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Imperialism and Film



**Aliens and
Immigrants in
Science Fiction**

**Hollywood's
Africa: Gorillas in
the Mist**

**Sans Soleil:
Under and Over
Development**

**Imperial Myths in
British
Documentary**

**Revolutionary
Film in the
Third World**

CineAction! No. 18 Fall 1989

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Imperialism Now

Watching the television news from El Salvador gives me the details of what billions of US dollars buy — rampaging death squads, a bombed city and terrified civilians, massacred priests, Green Beret tourists. The billions have bought a decade of life for another fascist client state — but can't seem to buy defeat of a tenacious and brave guerilla army. Will this show never go off the air?

As I watch, I know that the servile media of the West are already correcting and forgetting these images. The latest folksy killer in the White House can be turned to for reassuring words. America's great burden — bringing Democracy and Progress to every recalcitrant nation — must be shouldered; suitable "moderates" (President Cristiani!?) will be dressed up to oppose "extremists" of the left and right; normal levels of slaughter and commerce will hopefully resume.

Looking back over the '80s, imperialism — that is, capitalism's international organization of exploi-

tation and domination — seems intimidatingly powerful. Commodity relations penetrate everywhere. Several hundred multi-nationals dictate to a world economy more integrated and interdependent than ever. The Reagan Doctrine, that grisly intensification of long-standing American foreign policy, has sanctioned terrorist wars wherever the imperial monopolies have been threatened — Nicaragua, Afghanistan, Angola, Cambodia and, of course, El Salvador. The body count is in the millions.

This strength and ferocity has ensured that the imagery and ideology of imperialism are everywhere in the popular media. The so-called Third World provides exotic geography and peoples for countless rock video backgrounds, tourism ads, opportunities for Hollywood musclemen to refight imperial adventures. But alongside this naturalization, even a casual observer is inundated with news of ecological, economic and political catastrophe: famine, revolution, civil wars, massacres parade in head-

lines across the decade. However, the ideological blinkers of the West try not to connect this "news" to imperialism. These unfortunate events are just detours on the road to Progress; the West's intentions, especially America's, are always benevolent. In fact, the Third World — even the ubiquity of the phrase indicates a certain acquiescence to the hierarchical brutalities of unequal development — can be packaged in the latest fads: We Are The World took care of the famines, Sting is working on the rain forest, Bush fights his inane War on Drugs. The combination of moralistic displacement and aggression becomes increasingly ominous.

It is crucial to see that the headlines connect, that economic devastation and political repression for perhaps a majority of the world's population are part of the "success" of capitalism. Third World economies are being drained in a fashion only comparable to the piracy and slave trade of primitive capitalist accumulation several hundred years past. Millions starve and die in economies destroyed by serving debts to First World bankers; hundreds of millions suffer under the so-called austerity plans of the tyrannical International Monetary Fund. Despite the triumphal bombast of current bourgeois ideology, this is what's behind the glistening towers of Wall Street or Bay Street.

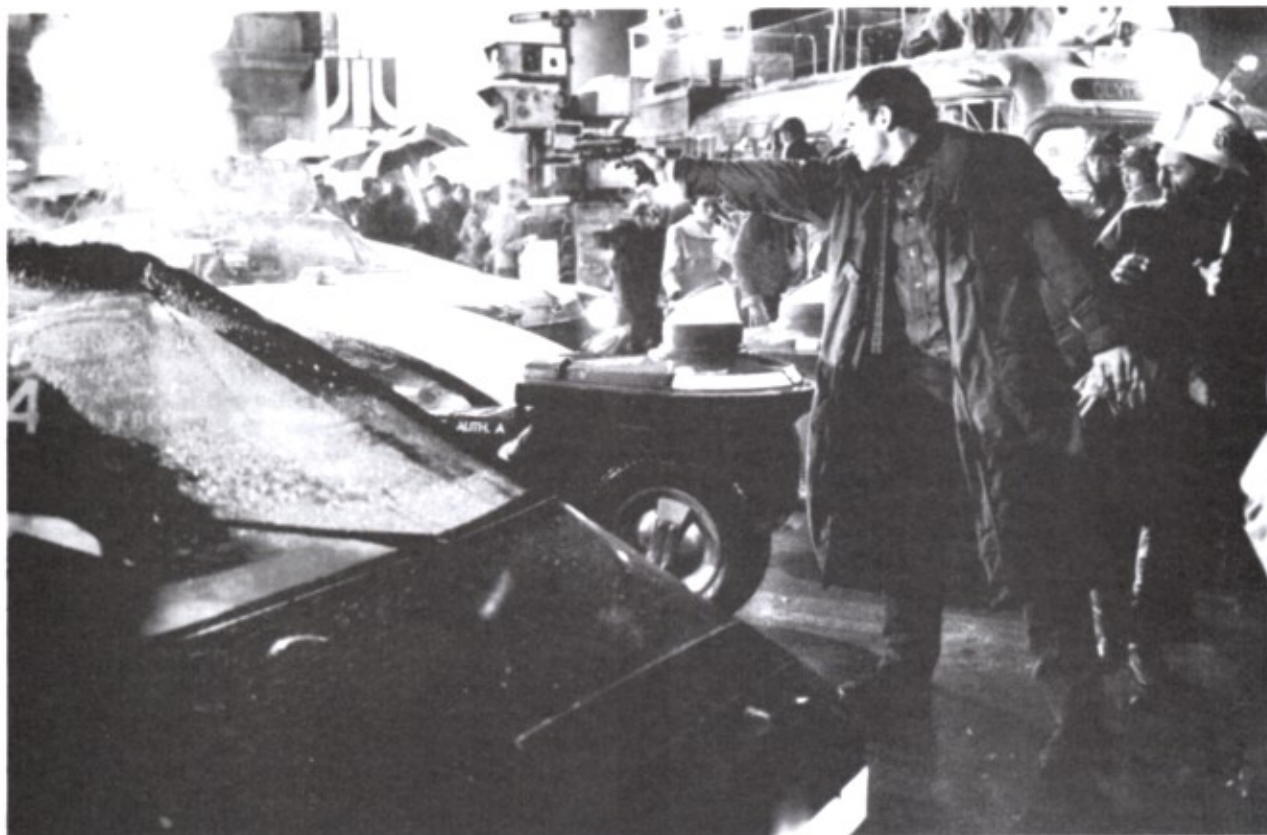
It's just as crucial to see that this imperial world is not monolithic or homogenous. The victories of anti-colonialist and socialist revolutions throughout the Third World in the decades since World War Two have been impressive achievements for humanity. The peoples of the Third World have not been simple victims; they have made themselves subjects of their own histories. It is partly the strength of these movements which has produced the vicious

counter-attack of recent years. Similarly, within the First World, solidarity movements with Third World struggles have fought to restrain the imperial adventurers.

The contributors collected in this issue examine some of the ways film relates to this volatile imperial world. Popular fiction, documentary and experimental work from Hollywood, France, Britain and various Third World nations are analysed. The critics find elaborate reflections of a divided world and encouraging oppositional developments. Chronologically, readers will traverse, culturally, hundreds of years of colonial brutality, the inter-imperial slaughter of World War Two, the continuation of exploitation under neo-colonial administration, the complex permutations of third worlds within the metropolitan nations, even on to future imagined worlds.

Scott Forsyth

Several personal notes should be added about *CineACTION!* In the last year, Lori Spring, Maureen Judge and Anthony Irwin have left the editorial collective to concentrate on filmmaking and teaching. They have all made important contributions to the magazine and we wish them well in their future work. Stuart Ross has been responsible for most of the typesetting, layout and design of the magazine for the last five years; he has recently left for an extended journey through Latin America and we would like to thank him for all his fine work. Finally, John Anderson has taken on the job of Business Manager to streamline and co-ordinate our operations.



Immigrants, Aliens, and Extraterrestrials:

by Charles Ramírez Berg

Science Fiction's Alien
"Other" as
(Among *Other* Things)
New
Hispanic Imagery

It's a movie image we've all seen: A mysterious craft gliding through outer space carrying a menacing passenger towards Earth. I am thinking of the very beginning of *Predator* (1987, John McTiernan), one of the hit movies of the summer of 1987, though the scene might be one from any number of Science Fiction (SF) films, either from the 1950s SF movie Golden Age or from the current SF renaissance. In the case of *Predator*, this unexplained Alien¹ invasion sets into motion yet another deadly confrontation between an extraterrestrial and a human hero called upon to save the world. Along with *Alien* (1979, Ridley Scott), *Aliens* (1986, James Cameron), and several other recent films, *Predator* is a good example of the traditional depiction of the Alien "Other" in American Science Fiction films — as a Destructive Monster whose sole purpose, it seems, is the eradication of human civilization. Additional examples of this type include remakes of two '50s SF classics, *Invaders from Mars* (1986, Tobe Hooper) and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978, Phil Kaufman), as well as such films as *Life Force*

(1985, Tobe Hooper), *Critters* (1986, Stephen Herek), *Night of the Comet* (1984, Thom Eberhardt), *Repo Man* (1984, Alex Cox), *Strange Invaders* (1983, Michael Laughlin), *The Terminator* (1984, James Cameron), *The Thing* (1982, John Carpenter), some episodes of *Twilight Zone — The Movie* (1983), and extends to spoofs like *Ghostbusters* (1984, Ivan Reitman) and *Little Shop of Horrors* (1986, Frank Oz).

But a new, increasingly popular Other in SF films has begun to rival the traditional Destructive Monster for primacy as outer space Other: the Sympathetic Alien. This wise, understanding extraterrestrial was an oddity back in the 1950s when it appeared in the memorable form of Michael Rennie's dignified Klaatu in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951, Robert Wise). Now the Sympathetic Alien is so common a figure that in the last ten years roughly one-half of the SF Alien films have one figuring in their narratives. This inversion of the clichéd Destructive Monster formula was firmly established by characters in the most successful SF films of all time: the Aliens in Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) and *ET: The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), and the knowing Yoda and the kindly Wookie Chewbacca and the various friendly Alien cohorts in the *Star Wars* series. Several of the films Spielberg and Lucas have since produced, including *Harry and the Henderson* (1987, William Dear), *Batteries Not Included* (1987, Mathew Robbins), *Gremlins* (1984, Joe Dante) and *Howard the Duck* (1986, Willard Huyck), have played variations on the Sympathetic Alien formula. In addition, sympathetic Others are major protagonists in *Enemy Mine* (1985, Wolfgang Petersen), *Cocoon* (1985, Ron Howard), *Iceman* (1984, Fred Schepesi), *The Last Starfighter* (1984, Nick Castle), *Short Circuit* (1986, John Badham), *Splash* (Ron Howard), *Starman* (1984, John Carpenter), in the *Superman* movies, and let us not forget *Star Trek's* distinguished Mr. Spock.

In this paper I want to look at the extraterrestrial Alien as it has been depicted in SF films since the resurgence of the SF genre in 1977 (the year both *Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* were released). I am looking for answers to several questions, among them: What does the Alien in these recent SF films signify? What does the introduction of the Sympathetic Alien mean? And in what way is the SF Alien connected to Hispanic imagery in America cinema? I will propose that these films fulfill an important mythic-cultural function by providing a cinematic arena for the unconscious reflection on the immigrant "question."

SF Movies and SF Monsters

Several critics have commented on the significance of the outer space Alien in SF films. The Alien invader in 1950s films has been seen as a personification of the Bomb, that is, a representation of collective nuclear fear and anxiety about the uses of atomic energy. Some have said that the Alien Creature is symbolic of repressed urges which threaten domestic tranquility.² Others speculate that the 1950s Alien Other is related to the Red Menace, "those massed hordes of Communists foisted on the American people by such venomous Red-baiters as Joseph McCarthy, Richard Nixon, and Billy Graham."³ Still others have discounted this notion in favour of a broader, oppositional, possibility: that in terms of American culture, the SF Alien simply stood for "everything the centre was not," basically "anything un-American, unfamiliar, alien."⁴ What all of these speculations have in common is the recognition of a narrative pattern that identifies foreign intruders as threats to national order and socio-ideological coherence.

Since the 1950s SF Golden Age, however, it seems something else is afoot. Commentators on renaissance (post-1977) SF have noted a shift both in the form and content of the movies and in the signification of the Other. Following Fredric Jameson, Vivian Sobchack, in *Screening Space*, posits that "new descriptions of contemporary experience have begun to emerge and dominate older ones" in the last decade. Among them is the practice of the figuration of "the cultural logic of late capitalism" in "the transformed poetics of the contemporary American SF film."⁵ Peter Fitting takes a different tack, and sees recent SF as visions of a post-apocalyptic future.⁶

Robin Wood, combining Marx and Freud, and building on Gad Horowitz's work, has found a way, I think, to link all these approaches together by framing his discussion of the horror films' monster Other in terms of oppression and repression. Recognizing that "Otherness can be theorized in many ways and on many levels," Wood views the Other as functioning "not simply as something external to the culture or to the self, but also as what is repressed (but never destroyed) in the self and projected outwards in order to be hated and disowned." On a society-wide level, the Other exists as a projection of what the culture represses. That is, the culture projects onto the Other "what is repressed within the Self, in order that it can be discredited, disowned, and if possible annihilated."⁷

The Other may stand for different things. Wood lists some figurative versions of the Other as it operates within our culture. Among the groups and ideas that are viewed by our culture as Other are other people, women, the proletariat, children, deviations from ideological or sexual norms, and, more pertinent to this study, other cultures and ethnic groups within the culture. Citing examples from horror films, Wood proceeds to illustrate the "monstrous" embodiments of the items on his list.⁸ What I want to do here, then, is to apply Wood's "other cultures" category to the SF Alien of the last decade. I will focus on other cultures as they are perceived to impinge upon national identity via immigration. I contend that these new extraterrestrial films are a culturally unconscious means of working out the whole question of immigration as it has emerged in the last several decades. Wood says that it is possible to say "that the true subject of the horror genre is the struggle for recognition of all that our civilization represses and oppresses."⁹ My project is first to propose a correspondence between immigrants and the SF Alien Others, and secondly to analyze it with the hope of unveiling what we as a society repress and oppress in regard to immigration.

If these films are indeed working out the immigrant question, then the Aliens are symbols for immigrants. Since Hispanics make up the majority of all alien groups in the US (naturalized, documented and undocumented), it follows that Science Fiction Aliens present a radically new image of the Hispanic in Hollywood cinema. Because the Alien in SF movies stands for new immigrants in general, it is a polysemic image of the un-American Other, a signifier with a number of signifieds. Among them are a number of ethnic, national, and racial groups. What I want to do is investigate one signifier-signified pair, the Alien as Hispanic immigrant, in order to track the consequences of moving the cinematic representation of Latinos from stereotypes (in which group members are portrayed as one-dimensional characters) to distortion (where they are depicted as non-human Aliens). I want to amplify on this, but first let me turn to a discussion of our recent "immigrant problem" to see how the latest influx of aliens is affecting our sense of national identity and

how it is that I contend that all immigrant aliens are represented by Alien intruders in Hollywood Science Fiction films.

The New Immigrants and the Extra Terrestrial

The 544,000 immigrants who are allowed legal entry to the US each year is actually fewer than the yearly number of legal immigrants who entered during the first two decades of this century, the years of heaviest immigration traffic in our history (8.5 million entered legally during 1900-1910 alone).¹⁰ But to this number there needs to be added undocumented aliens residing here as well as the inflow of undocumented immigrants. The number of undocumented aliens living in the US at any one time is hard to pinpoint; the US Census Bureau estimated in 1978 that the figure was anywhere between 3.5 to 6 million.¹¹ The number of aliens who attempt illegal entry every year is similarly difficult to calculate. The statistics show that for the last several years an average of more than one million aliens per year enter the US without proper documentation; nearly 5.8 million were apprehended by the INS from 1980-1985.¹² But these figures are confounded by three factors. First, those who are caught represent a fraction of those attempting to cross (in 1980 one Border Patrol official in El Paso told me he estimated one in ten aliens attempting entry was apprehended). Second, yearly alien apprehension numbers are inflated since many aliens attempt border crossings more than once a year. Third, an unknown percentage of illegal immigrants enter the US for short stays, then return home. Nevertheless, it is clear that the total number of immigrants coming to the US in recent years is a formidable figure.

I want to suggest that among other things — because as Wood says a culture's Other is not one thing, but several Other things — the SF Alien is a figure for the tide of alien immigrants who have been entering the country in increasing numbers for the past several decades. Among the historical events which helped to create this latest crop of immigrants I would isolate three moments. They are:

1) Fidel Castro's rise to power in Cuba in 1959, which resulted immediately in three-quarters of a million immigrants coming to the US. Other Cubans would continue immigrating to the present day; by the end of the 1970s there were more than one million Cuban Americans living in the US.

2) The cessation of the *bracero* programme in 1964. Begun during World War II to supplement the US labour force, the *bracero* programme had allowed Mexican nationals — hundreds of thousands of them by the 1950s, some say millions by the mid-1960s — to work legally in the US. Shutting down the programme closed what was at least a safety valve for Mexicans trying to get work in the US, in effect forcing them underground.

3) The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, put into effect in 1968, which abandoned the quota system and had the effect of shifting the immigrants' place of national origin from Old World to Third.¹³

My contention is that since the last great flowering of Hollywood SF in the 1950s, the movie Alien now symbolizes real-life aliens — documented and undocumented immigrants who have entered, and continue to attempt to enter, the United States.

Hispanics constitute the largest immigrant group. Of those naturalized in 1985, for example, 46 per cent were Hispanics. In the same year, the percentage of Hispanics among

deported aliens was 93 per cent.¹⁴ As I have said, the SF Alien is a signifier with a number of signifieds. Among them are new immigrants in general and — since they are the largest group — alien Hispanics in particular.

Of course it could be argued that the new SF Alien also stands for Asians, too, or any other of the world's peoples that make up the new immigrant. But I will limit my discussion to the group most heavily represented among the new immigrants, and compare Hispanic's SF representations — as Alien Others — with their usual, stereotypical depictions. Recognizing that another similar essay could compare, for instance, Asian stereotypes and Alien monsters, I nevertheless purposely restrict my focus to Hispanics for purposes of convenience and manageability. In the discussion of cinematic stereotypes, therefore, I will deal only with Hollywood's depiction of the Hispanic. Beyond mere convenience, comparing the traditional Hispanic stereotype — which has a long history in American cinema — with the new Alien provides me with a powerful critical dialectic that allows me to chart an interesting pattern of displacement and distortion, and gives me a way to resolve a troubling problem posed by the arrival of the renaissance SF alien — why have stereotyped cinematic representations of the Hispanic only recently become so grossly debased?

New Hispanic Images in American Cinema

Thus far we have noted a double representation change. One is the split in the symbology of the Alien in SF films, where the outer space creature can now be either a traditional Destructive Monster or a newer Sympathetic Alien. A second is the distortion of Hispanic (and other ethnic group) imagery. The emergence of the Alien as an Hispanic image is significant. As we know, since the days of silent cinema not just Hispanics but all ethnics have been dealt with in American movies mainly by stereotyping. Now an interesting distortion has occurred: Hispanics and other ethnics have become Creatures from Another Planet, Aliens that must be eliminated — either lovingly, or by returning them to their native environments (*ET*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Harry and the Hendersons*, *Iceman*, *Splash* [1984, Ron Howard], *Cocoon* [1986, Ron Howard]) or violently, by destroying them (*Alien/s*, *Predator*, *The Terminator*, *The Aurora Encounter*, *Critters* [1986, Stephen Herek]).

Where does such distortion come from and what does it signify? As I develop my argument I want to offer sociological, historical, psychological and ultimately ideological answers. As a starting proposition, let me begin by saying that part of the answer is the perceived heightening of political and economic stakes placed upon the system by the new immigrant. The rise in the number of immigrants coming to the US over the last two decades coincides with the gradual national realization of finiteness over the same period of time. From the native-born American's point of view, these new aliens are competition for a limited number of jobs and a dwindling reserve of social services. Stereotyped Hispanic images were common cinematic currency over a long period of our nation's history when the dominant Anglo majority was not fundamentally threatened by Hispanics, immigrants, or any other racial or ethnic minority group. Now the threat is palpable. The new Alien portrayal of the Hispanic immigrant is the symbolic correlative of a majority perception of the immigrant shifting from neglect to resentment. Such swings in the cognizance and treatment of immigrants by dominant groups in this country go back at least to the 1800s:

During times of contentment and prosperity immigrants who did not conform were usually left to fend for themselves, but in times of emotional or economic adversity they have been victimized. Sometimes they have been labeled as the causes of the national difficulties; at other times they have stood in for elite groups as a more socially acceptable outlet for the release of high tensions.¹⁵

Anya Peterson Royce delineates different sorts of social dynamics between groups, based on power relationships, and the changing nature of the stereotyping that results. She notes the shifts in the severity of the language used by groups as the power available to them is more competitively contested.¹⁶ In the case of stratified social relations between a dominant group holding practically uncontested power over a subordinate group, the less powerful group is often typed along a spectrum of possibilities from harmless and childlike to dangerous. In the case of Hispanic film images, these correspond to the recognized stereotypes running the gamut from the male buffoon (Pancho in *The Cisco Kid*, Sgt. Garcia in *Zorro*) or the corresponding female clown (Carmen Miranda's Lady in the Tutti-Frutti Hat) to a long line of slick Latin lovers (from Rudolph Valentino in *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* [1921, Rex Ingram] and *Blood and Sand* [1922, Fred Niblo] to Tyrone Power's characters in *Blood and Sand* and a *Zorro* remake [1941; *The Mark of Zorro*, 1940, both directed by Rouben Mamoulian]), and includes alluring but treacherous half-breed harlots (Linda Darnell's Chihuahua in *My Darling Clementine* [1946, John Ford] as well as the sneaky *bandito* (from the silent "greaser" films to almost any Western of the sound era).

In the oppositional case of two groups competing for power and resources, however, stereotyping is different. The dominant group that once had autonomous use of now-contested power is naturally threatened, and its response tends to be hostile. Royce's example is the loss of power experienced by white Southern males after the Civil War, the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, and the increase in the number of lynchings of Blacks during that period. That violence mirrored dominant group confusion over "the breakdown of a world where everyone shared knowledge of the categories, stereotypes, and social rules — a world where each individual knew his or her place and did not challenge its appropriateness."¹⁷ Certainly one factor that is perceived to threaten the Anglo-dominant American society's ordered world view today is the increasing influx of immigrants. An upsetting aspect of the immigrant flow to the empowered majority is the severe strain it puts on the American melting-pot ideal. Consequently, beyond threats to power, resources, and social order, there are also perceived threats to national well-being and psycho-social "order" in terms of the disruption of a nation's sense of ideological equilibrium and self-identity.

This anti-foreign, pro-native sentiment has deep historical roots. "The spirit of American nativism," writes John Higham, "appeared long before the word was coined about 1840 and had its deepest impact long after the word had largely dropped out of common parlance." One later form of American xenophobia, "racial nativism," linked the Anglo-Saxon "race" with national greatness.¹⁸ And for most of the 19th century the notion of the Anglo-Saxon as essential national idea proved to be compatible with the founding ideals of humanity, democracy, and equal rights, fostering a general belief in the efficacy of immigrant assimilation. In fact, during the last three decades of that century, America's often-invoked mission was to serve as a shelter for the freedom-loving oppressed of the world. Emma Lazarus's

fund-raising verse for the Statue of Liberty was emblematic of such feeling:

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!¹⁹

But, as Higham notes, there is condescension and contradiction in the invitation. In its self-congratulatory way, the poem expresses the belief that the immigrants yearn for a deliverance from oppression which only America can grant them, yet they are deemed "wretched refuse." The immigrant was perceived, then as now, as both boon and burden — and at times even a menace.

Ambivalent attitudes towards new immigrants stretch back at least a hundred years in American history, revealing a complex and painful tension. A nation that prides itself on having been founded and built by immigrants, that cherishes the diversity of its roots ("E pluribus unum"), and calls itself the melting pot of the world, is the same nation that has a well-documented record of antagonisms toward new immigrants, sometimes erupting into episodes of outright violence. This ambivalence continues to be played out today. Recent events provide numerous conflicted examples of the clash between official pride and existential concern that are centred, in one way or another, around the immigrant question. For example there was the extended congressional debate over the immigration reform bill, lasting roughly six years, and resulting in the Simpson-Rodino-Mazzoli Immigration Reform Act of 1986.²⁰ There is the controversy surrounding the Sanctuary movement, the underground asylum programme for Salvadoran refugees. Another example is the millions spent refurbishing the Statue of Liberty and the elaborate commemorative celebration for the Statue harkening back to the days of Emma Lazarus's poem and America's ethnocentric open-door policy. In startling contrast to this were the 1987 prison riots by about-to-be-deported immigrants, the Marielitos, protesting their forced return to Cuba.

Fredric Jameson posits the notion of a unitary political unconscious, and calls for a kind of criticism that recognizes that "there is nothing that is not social and historical — indeed that everything is 'in the last analysis' political," a criticism that follows through and explores "the multiple paths that lead to the unmasking of cultural artifacts as socially symbolic acts."²¹ In the realm of film, Thomas G. Schatz hypothesizes that genre movies operate "as socially symbolic acts" in a way similar to the Lévi-Straus model of myth, namely "to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction."²² Following in their footsteps is Peter Fitting who, in his discussion of recent SF, sees the genre unconsciously addressing social "troubles":

Like the manifest content of our dreams which can only emerge in heavily coded representations, these filmic images of the future are displaced signals from the social unconscious. Distorted so as to be unrecognizable, these indications of major troubles in our present, these signs of its fractures and contradictions work their way to the surface more easily in these less censored popular films, while the catastrophes of which they speak are not to be talked about in polite society.²³

My position here is that one of the "major troubles" being addressed by the Alien SF movies is America's century-long melting pot dilemma. The immigrant question goes beyond an ingroup competing with an outgroup for resources. And it goes beyond ingroup scapegoating of a politically powerless

outgroup (another possible cause of stereotyping²⁴). The new immigrant "invasion" calls into question the very identity of the nation itself, and the rejection of the Alien in SF is projected, mass-mediated nativism. Viewed in this light, the SF Alien film since 1976 represents a forum for the national consideration of the "immigrant problem," though it is far from an open one since it constantly comes to the same conclusion: the status quo can only be maintained by exclusion. Writing about the 1950s SF Alien, Judith Hess Wright says that those films built on fears of the intrusive and the overpowering and thereby promoted isolationism.²⁵ Extending that analysis to the SF films of today, that isolationist programme takes specific historical shape in the advocacy of a closed-door immigration policy, which the 1986 Immigration Law sought to ensure. Today's SF film provides an arena for the negotiation of the pluralist/nativist tension; in order for this to occur, the immigrant takes the symbolic shape of the Alien.

This helps clarify the new figure of the Sympathetic Alien. The contradictory American position, that historically and officially honours its immigrant roots while simultaneously shunning new immigrants, produces a considerable measure of psychic guilt. This assimilation/nativist tension is partially assuaged by the creation of the prescient, kindly-but-knowing Sympathetic SF Alien. Such characters allow the dominant group to appreciate the positive qualities of the intruders while at the same time to recognize their intrinsic (and irreconcilable) difference from us (and US). What we are made to realize through the appreciation/deportation narratives of Sympathetic Alien SF is that for all the space crea-

tures' virtues they are still Aliens — a difference that not only makes a difference, but all the difference in the world. In narrative terms, this necessitates the Sympathetic Alien leaving Earth and returning home. The Sympathetic Aliens in *Close Encounters*, *Cocoon*, *E.T.*, *The Last Starfighter*, and *Splash* all return home, while the good Aliens in *Gremlins*, *Harry and the Hendersons*, and *Iceman* are returned to their natural habitat by human agents.

The Sympathetic Alien allows us to have it both ways: we can appreciate the aliens, and even learn from them. But in the end we must return to normality by sending *them* home — for their own good. Harry, ET and the Neanderthal man in *Iceman* are all returned to where they came from because they could not survive in the United States; for one reason or another their new Earth environment was life-threatening. In so doing the human heroes do the Aliens a favour — they are actually saving the extraterrestrials' lives. In terms of the immigrant question, this narrative resolution neatly blends both nativist sentiment and common humanity to rationalize deportation as more beneficial to aliens than to us. Deportation exists for the good of aliens, these films say; like ET, aliens simply cannot exist (nor should they try) in our rarefied atmosphere. It would be best for all concerned — especially Them — if they left.

What will happen to aliens should they refuse to leave is illustrated metaphorically — and graphically — by the Destructive Monster SF films. Pushed to the ultimate limit by the Alien invasion, the human protagonists of these films do battle with the monster from outer space until it is eradicated. Aliens in Destructive Monster movies from *Alien* to *Predator*



The sympathetic Mr. Spock: *Star Trek III*

to *Blade Runner* are sucked into outer space, blasted to smithereens, or die a merciless, genetically engineered death. The message seems to be as clear and succinct as it is brutal: A/alien, go home or die. Just as intriguing as the narrative formula that repeatedly eliminates the Alien in these films, however, is the process that accounts for the transformation of the Hispanic image in American films from the various human stereotypes into a Creature from Outer Space.

The Alien as Dream Work

How do you go from a dream (in which the Hispanic is represented as a stereotype) to a nightmare (where Hispanic alien = Alien creature)? "The conditions under which a dream becomes a nightmare," Robin Wood says, "are (a) that the repressed wish is, from the point of view of consciousness, so terrible that it must be repudiated as loathsome, and (b) that it is so strong and powerful as to constitute a serious threat."²⁶ Having established the real-life external pressure immigrants place on national sovereignty and resources, as well as the internal psychological tension produced by the presence of the aliens (together with another threatening fact I haven't yet mentioned: Hispanics will soon become the national majority), the next step is to account for how the nightmare takes shape.

The psychoanalytic understanding of the Hispanic image's radical transformation from a human stereotype like the greaser bandit to a murderous Alien monster, and the basis for Wood's dream-to-nightmare progression above is provided by Freud in his discussion of the dream-work. A dream is wish fulfillment; some dreams are undisguised wish-fulfillments, other less recognizable. "In cases where the wish fulfillment is unrecognizable, where it has been disguised," Freud said, "there must have existed some inclination to put up a defense against the wish; and owing to this defense the wish was unable to express itself except in a distorted shape."²⁷ This dream-distortion Freud describes as a result of the battle between two "psychical forces" or "agencies" within the dreamer. "One of these forces," Freud writes, "constructs the wish which is expressed by the dream, while the other exercises a censorship upon this dream-wish and, by the use of that censorship, forcibly brings about a distortion in the expression of the wish." The first force presents the wish to the second force which determines if that wish needs to be distorted before reaching consciousness. "Nothing," says Freud, "can reach consciousness from the first system without passing the second agency; and the second agency allows nothing to pass without exercising its right and making such modifications as it thinks fit in the thought which is seeking admission to consciousness."²⁸

This psychoanalytic schema can be applied to the case of Hispanic imagery in Hollywood cinema and SF films to provide an explanation for the dual, progressively distorted representation (stereotyped human to Alien creature) of Hispanics. Stereotyped versions of the Hispanic correspond to (relatively) undisguised dreams, serving to fulfill the wish of the dominant society to exercise control of Hispanics by belittling, ridiculing, and exaggerating them into the margin. Since in traditional Hollywood films the stereotyped representation of the Hispanic at least retains human form, as compared with the Alien extraterrestrial, the cinematic Hispanic stereotype achieves its marginalizing ends through only a modicum of distortion. The Alien Others, on the other hand, are fully disguised symbols for immigrants and Hispanics. Here the immigrant Other has gone through society's

two-stage dream-work process of wish fulfillment and distortion.

Freud links dream-distortion to the need of the dreamer to prevent anxiety or other distressing feelings,²⁹ and Wood says that the dream becomes nightmare when what is wished for is loathsome, powerful, and a serious threat. I speculate that the root cause of the cinematic distortion of the Hispanic goes far beyond concerns about loss of jobs or the drain on social services which the Immigration Reform Act sought to redress — though those material concerns are important. Something more fundamental is perceived to be at stake: national identity, the ideal of a unified, national "self." What Higham said about nativism in the early years of the 20th century is applicable today:

Nativism cut deeper than economic jealousy or social disapproval. It touched the springs of fear and hatred; it breathed a sense of crisis. Above all, it expressed a military defensive nationalism; an aroused conviction that an intrusive element menaced the unity, and therefore the integrity and survival, of the nation itself.³⁰

We distort for fear of losing our national self.

Negative and Positive Stereotypes

In linking the stereotype with the distortion for analytical purposes, it will be profitable to look at the psychological mechanism of stereotyping. Sander L. Gilman uses developmental psychology to account for stereotyping, and his breakdown can be used as a model to delineate the traditional Hispanic stereotypes in Hollywood cinema.³¹ His approach will also give us a way to interpret the distorted Hispanic Alien. Stereotyping, which everyone creates, has its origin in subjects at some time in early infancy (from the age of several weeks to six months) and is linked to the child's growing awareness of the difference between self and world. When, to the child, self=world, control is absolute. As the child realizes that the world is much more than the self, anxiety arises due to the concomitant loss of control. As a coping strategy the child divides the self, and the world, into good (able to be controlled and anxiety-free) and bad (unable to be controlled and anxiety-full) halves. Next, the child distances the good self from the bad, creating an "us = good"/"them = bad" dichotomy. This psychic process is dynamic and situational, requiring the subject to redefine the boundary between self and Other according to stresses made upon the psyche. The Other takes on a protean quality, allowing it to take a myriad of forms as the situation warrants. The us/them anxiety is projected onto the Other to produce the stereotype.

Gilman explains the Other as both positive and negative. "The Other is invested with all of the qualities of the 'bad' and the 'good.'" Both positive and negative stereotypes exist. "The 'bad' Other becomes the negative stereotype; the 'good' Other becomes the positive stereotype. The former is that which we fear to become; the latter, that which we fear we cannot achieve."³² This allows us to think of the standard Hispanic stereotypes in an interesting way — as negative or positive projections of dominant group anxiety. We can arrange six conventional Hispanic stereotypes in two triad groups, based on gender. Each triad consists of a central positive stereotype and two negative ones: a positive centre with two negative alternatives. For example, the two negative female stereotypes (the half-breed harlot and the clown) are opposed to the positive one (the dark lady). And the "greaser" *bandido* and male buffoon are opposed to the mysterious and magnetic Latin lover. It is important to



Naturalized Aliens? *Star Trek IV*

remember that whether negative or positive, these are still stereotypes — rigidly applied, crude, oversimplified representations of a group — and that even the positive stereotypes operate by marginalization. The dark lady and the Latin lover, while perhaps more tolerable to the dominant group and maybe flattering to Hispanics, are still flat, one-dimensional, generalized types, nothing more. Dolores del Rio was alluring, but aloof, detached, apart; Fernando Lamas was romantic, but like all Latin lovers possessor of some special sort of sexual magic that differentiated him from the Anglo male. The result: both of these characters were just as distanced from the Anglo majority, by idealization rather than denigration, as their treacherous or clownish counterparts. All of this is of interest to us here because there are corresponding positive (the Sympathetic Alien) and negative (the Destructive Monster) extraterrestrials in 1970s and 1980s Alien SF.

Superman and Spock: "Naturalized" Aliens

Such Alien analogues of the established Hispanic stereotypes provide a framework to begin the analysis of those texts. For example, it gives us a way to account for such apparent anomalies as Superman and Spock, the Sympathetic Aliens who are not ushered out of our universe. First we must recognize the beneficial role of these two characters. Superman is a saviour figure who rids the planet of world-threatening devastation. Mr. Spock, half-human, half-Alien, is clearly a less deific Other, though his contribution is still unique to the human crew of the Starship *Enterprise*: a com-

bination of superior intellectual ability and calculated judgment.

These two likable and heroic figures function in much the same way as the Hispanic dark lady or Latin lover: they are characters imbued with special powers which set them apart from "normal" humans. And like the dark lady or the Latin lover they are allowed a place in Anglo society when they have demonstrated the difference that they represent has a potentially positive payoff. The Dolores del Rio characters in *Flying Down to Rio* (1933, Thorton Freeland) and *In Caliente* (1935, Lloyd Bacon) are so hotly pursued by the male Anglo protagonists because, though perhaps never expressed in so many words, they are like no other women in the (Anglo) world. Ricardo Montalban's ChuChu Ramirez in *My Man and I* (1952, William Wellman) is allowed entry to the Anglo world not when he becomes a naturalized citizen, but only when he proves his value to the system (through hard work, productivity, determination, and mostly his unquestioning patriotic loyalty to the United States). Similarly, Sympathetic Aliens are allowed to stay if they can offer a unique service to the dominant majority — especially if they can protect humans from destructive alien forces. In *Blade Runner*, for example, Rachel, a Replicant herself, saves Deckard's life by killing another Replicant; Howard the Duck saves the world from the impending invasion of Alien "dark overlords of the universe," and the android Bishop saves Ripley's life in *Aliens*. Sympathetic Aliens' contributions are so uniquely beneficial that not only are they allowed to stay, but are invited to stay with open arms. Once here, they will pass from acculturation to the desired (and only acceptable) end: "naturalization." Dolores del Rio's characters mentioned above

don't have far to go: she is already an upper class debutante in *Flying Down to Rio* and possesses all the proper high-class trappings in *In Caliente*. The narrative logic of ChuChu Ramirez's character is that he becomes a better American than a native-born citizen, and thus reminds the rest of us "what being an American is all about." Likewise, we are tickled when the half-human Spock finally and convincingly displays his appreciation — and application — of human qualities in *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home* (1986, Leonard Nimoy). When he depends upon a "human" trait we recognize he is almost "home," almost one of us. One of the high points of the *Superman* films is Superman and Lois Lane's lovemaking. Viewers are made to wonder what they have wondered since the days of Rudolph Valentino — what must super sex with a super lover be like? Once again, as it was for the dark lady-Anglo male and the Latin lover-Anglo female pairings, sex is the great leveler of social barriers — extraordinary lovers have an automatic *entrée* to our society.

But afterwards, it is expected that the A/alien adapt and finally become a native. Thus, by *Superman III*, the Alien who is "more powerful than a locomotive" marries a divorced mother and settles down to earthling family life. The narrative trajectory of the *Star Trek* and *Superman* series allows us, then, to see a crucial immigrant/native trade-off. America will drop its isolationist barrier to get something uniquely valuable, be it a beautiful dark lady, a Latin lover, Mikhail Baryshnikov, or Superman. The Alien, in exchange for this acceptance, must do what generations of aliens have been called on to do for centuries — assimilate. That is, Superman, Mr. Spock, Howard the Duck and the other naturalized SF Aliens must find a way to negotiate the exchange of original values, "such as personal loyalty to friends and origins, for social and ethical values that allow identification with the society of one's choice. Successful assimilation . . . means a real, if unacknowledged, rejection and repudiation of the family and friends with whom one grew up."¹¹ Thus for America, it becomes simply a matter of shrewd business, acquiring what you don't have in order to maintain power. Such gaps in America's nativism are never threatening because the end-point of this process is the place where assimilation and co-optation converge. Howard the Duck becomes a rock'n'roll star. ChuChu Ramirez becomes the ideal American; Superman fights for "Truth, Justice, and the American Way."

What we are made to see here is the way the psychological mechanism of stereotyping vaults us into the realm of the ideological. For cinematic stereotyping, because of the way it structures thinking, is hegemony. It does its work by generalization and repetition, creating a simplified — but comprehensive and "natural" — world view. The Alien distortion is merely one more turn of that same screw.

The Terminator: (Pro)Creating the Correct Future

On one level, *The Terminator* is a film about the radicalization of a woman. Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton) goes from being a carefree single woman at the movie's beginning to a politically committed single mother by film's end. And so on the one hand the film is to be applauded for its progressive feminist narrative. But on the other, from the viewpoint of how the Alien is portrayed, how it functions in the narrative, and the manner in which "We" finally defeat "Them," there are enough disturbing elements to give one pause.

The Terminator is a fascinating variation on the time-travel

theme. Its back-to-the-present narrative provides an excellent illustration of the way SF can provide, as Fredric Jameson says, a new slant on history, allowing us a perspective from which we become "conscious of our present as the past of some unexplained future rather than as the future of a heroic national past."¹⁴ Though in the film the insurance of the proper heroic (and human) future requires the proper preservation and manipulation of the right set of genes. Thus, *The Terminator* plants the seeds of its eugenic message early. The battle for the survival of the human race begins now. The prologue, appearing on the screen at the film's opening with the bleak landscape of the Alien dominated future in the background (there are an abundance of human skulls amidst the rubble, crushed beneath the heavy treads of the Alien war machines), makes the racial stakes very clear:

The machine rose from the ashes of nuclear fire. Their war to exterminate mankind had raged for decades, but the final battle would not be fought in the future. It would be fought here, in our present. Tonight . . .

We are in danger of being dominated — and exterminated — by Them. Our survival is precarious at best. It is a battle that cannot be put off any longer but must be waged immediately.

The Alien here, a futuristic *bandolero*, is a cyborg (Arnold Schwarzenegger) from 44 years into the future — a time when humans fight with their cyborg masters for survival. After years of fighting a revolutionary war against their computerized overlords, humans are finally winning. In a desperate move, the cyborg rulers send an unstoppable robot warrior, a Terminator, back in time to alter history. If the Terminator can find and murder Sarah, he will prevent the birth of her son, who grows to be the rebel leader who spearheads the overthrow of computerized rule. This Alien is a fearful killer, described as "an infiltration unit, part man, part machine." It represents, we are told, a significant advance over previous cyborgs in that superficially it is human, though internally it is driven by a high tech brain and micro chip heart. Kyle (Michael Biehn), the rebel who is sent back in time to warn Sarah, describes it well: "Underneath it's a hyper-alloy, combat chassis, micro-processor controlled — fully armored, very tough. But outside it's living human tissue: flesh, skin, hair, blood . . . They look human: sweat, bad breath, everything. Very hard to spot." (This last sentence might be spoken by a Border Patrol officer looking for aliens along the U.S. Mexico border, where distinguishing between resident Mexican-Americans can be difficult in the extreme.) Thus the threat of this film's Alien "race" is doubly pernicious: they are powerful and they look just like us.

The Terminator is, of course, an anti-technology fable. Warning of the potential terrors of the blind acceptance of new technologies, it is yet another instance of the familiar progress-run-amok SF theme. But the film is at the same time a paean of isolationism and racial paranoia. Schwarzenegger's cyborg is an "infiltration unit," built to invade — and destroy — human colonies. In one of Kyle's "flash-backs" (to his past, our future), he recalls a bloody incident at an underground human hiding place — an infiltrating cyborg brutally massacres an entire community. The Alien intruders of the future, once they have established their dominance, have a fascistic single-mindedness about achieving their goal of racial extermination. Indeed, Kyle's descriptions of the automated death camps of the technocratic future, in which humans are slaughtered night and day, conjures up frightful reminiscences of Nazi Germany. Yet the film invokes Nazism on the human side as well when the rebel counterattack relies on a disturbing combination of eugenics and the



Cyborg bandolero: *The Terminator*

Christ story: Sarah and Kyle must mate in order to procreate the saviour of the race.

The deeper structure of this survivalist narrative involves the construction of a workable response to the impending dominance of the Alien "hordes." One of the underlying threats alien immigrants have always posed to the native mainstream is not only their present numbers, but their procreative potential. This argument took formal — and acceptable — intellectual shape in the late 1800s when Francis A. Walker, president of MIT and a leading economist, combined nativism, eugenics, Darwinism, and declining native birth rates to construct a racial basis for native American superiority in the face of the influx of what he viewed as unassimilative races. That century's new immigrants, "beaten men from beaten races; representing the worst failures in the struggle for existence,"³⁵ would nevertheless be able, through uncontrolled reproduction, to defeat native Americans biologically. The answer to this, which only true racism was able to provide, was eugenics. In other words, native Americans, unable to compete numerically with the wave of immigrants' procreative advantage by exploiting and maintaining their own (inbred) advantage — the "natural" superiority of the Anglo-Saxon "race."

Eugenics and anthropology added the needed theoretical basis for nativism at the end of the last century and the beginning of this one, and when that line of thinking reached the point where it proclaimed one race superior to another, it resulted in racism. *The Terminator* illustrates a two-pronged answer to the alien invasion implicit in the logic of the racist argument: eliminating Them and maintaining Anglo-Saxon racial purity. The coming take-over by computers is not necessarily the future, but as Kyle puts it, "One possible future." The US might survive in the face of immigrant infiltration, but only if it acts quickly. In the film's terms: if the right man and the right woman join sexually, the human race has a chance to create not only a future saviour of the race, but maintain the racial purity needed to defeat Aliens. Today, to insure the best possible future, vigilance is needed — eternal vigilance. As Sarah says to Kyle once she has fully comprehended the severity of the crisis and its irreversible human implications, "It'll never be over, will it?"

No. It will never be over because We already let too many of Them in. And, as another cyborg film alien, *Blade Runner* shows, They are getting harder and harder to find and eliminate from our society.

Blade Runner: A Critique of Neo-Nativism

Blade Runner foresees a somewhat different future ahead in nearly the same time period (2019) as *The Terminator*, one in which humans still have an upper hand. But not the uppermost hand. That belongs to the powerful Tyrell Corporation which runs things, and creates this film's Alien Others, the cyborg Replicants. The Tyrell Corporation is the shape of 21st century capitalism. "Commerce is our goal here at Tyrell," Mr. Tyrell says, speaking of the company's most cherished commercial venture, the Replicants, "More human than human is our motto" (more than a little reminiscent of General Electric's past and current phrases, "Progress is our most important product" and "We bring good things to life").

The problem for *Blade Runner* Deckard (Harrison Ford), a specially-trained policeman who executes Replicants, are the things Tyrell has brought to life. They become proble-



matic because of the Tyrell Corporation's creation ethics. The Replicants — used as slave labour, for hazardous explorations and the colonization of other planets — are better humans than humans. "The NEXUS 6 Replicants," we are told at the film's beginning, are "superior in strength and agility, and at least equal in intelligence, to the genetic engineers who created them." When a group of renegade Replicants mutiny in outer space (the "Off World"), they are "declared illegal on earth — under penalty of death." Deckard's assignment, in the terminology of the Tyrell Corporation, is to "retire" the rebellious Replicants.

From our perspective, *Blade Runner* is a meditation on, and a critique of, nativism. Deckard is the next century's Border Patrolman, charged with the identification and extermination of Alien trespassers. As it is for the Border Patrolmen today, the *Blade Runner*'s job is the maintenance of national, cultural, social, psychological, and political unity and identity. He is paid to be able to distinguish Them from Us and to eradicate Them from our midst. Deckard's dilemma is very similar to the Border Patrolman played by Jack Nickolson in *The Border*, namely how to uphold national identity in the face of aliens' demonstrated humanity. *Blade Runner*'s main conflict is psychological: Deckard's inner tension between his job and his conscience. In this way, the film raises questions about the justice and humanity of America's policy of cold-blooded nativist isolationism.

For *Blade Runner* establishes well the Replicants' humanness. In part the Replicants could be said to be a combination of negative *bandido* and the superhuman Latin lover, though as the film progresses, they leave one-dimensional stereotyping as Alien bad guys behind and develop into complex char-



"more human than human": *Blade Runner*

acters. In terms of the Hispanic stereotype, the Replicant leader, Roy, could be compared with Raza, Jack Palance's revolutionary general in *The Professionals* (1966, Richard Brooks). Raza is first seen summarily executing *Federales* en masse. Later we voyeuristically watch as he makes passionate love to his woman. It is only in the last third of the film that we understand his motivation, which greatly softens his earlier, stereotypical actions. By the film's end, he has left the stereotypical *bandido* behind and approaches a much more fully rounded characterization. So too, Roy is at first presented as evil and menacing — an Aryan Destructive Monster. By the end of *Blade Runner*, when he saves Deckard's life, his tragedy is clear: he is a superhuman who simply wants to be human.

The problem, just as it is in *The Terminator*, is Us (US): what We have done and what We have allowed to happen (in the film's past, which is our present). Again, the film shows the fear of technology in the harrowing future that new tech will bring, of which the authoritarian Tyrell Corporation is only the most obvious sign. But it also shows the chaotic results of ethnic pluralism (that we are allowing to happen today). Simple communicative tasks are difficult. Deckard has trouble ordering food from an Asian street vendor. Gaff (Edward James Olmos), Deckard's assistant, speaks a street gibberish, which Deckard tells us is a combination "of Japanese, Spanish, German, whatever." The teeming multicultural make-up of the people in the streets is depicted as the dark side of the melting pot: chaos, filth, overcrowding, disorder. This technologized future world is a disintegrating Babel that shows the fearful results of an open-door immi-

gration policy. Symbolically, our immigrant dilemma becomes the new century's aliens, the Replicants, a problem We created. The patronizing and condescending side of America's open door policy resurfaces in the Tyrell Corporation's implied position on the rebel Replicants: We created them, We gave them a chance, and their rebellion is the thanks We receive in return. In reality the chance the Replicants were given was the opportunity to be exploited. The Replicants are 21st century *braceros*. Their lot is unpleasant at best, and they are intelligent and human enough to realize it. "Quite an experience to live in fear, isn't it?" Roy, the Replicant leader asks Deckard, just at the point when he could kill him. "That's what it is to be a slave."¹⁶

All they want, once introduced to Our life, is a chance to live it. "I want more life!" Roy tells Tyrell. And, of course, that is precisely what We cannot allow Them to have, not without risking our dominance. "You were built as well as we could make you," Tyrell responds. "But not to last," Roy replies. The designers realized the inherent danger of creating slaves "more human than human," and so built in a fail-safe mechanism — Replicants automatically die in four years. What the turncoat Replicants want is normal mortality. *Blade Runner* asks the fundamental question of nativism: Why can't They stay? It asks us to consider how humane denying them "life" is. How humane was it to bring in Mexican labourers (by some estimates five million of them) during the 22-year-long *bracero* programme, then — when their usefulness was over — declare them, as the Replicants are declared in *Blade Runner*, "illegal on Earth"? How humane was it to accept the Marielitos with open arms, then round

them up and attempt to send them back? Why must the Mexican *braceros* and the Cuban Marielitos be relegated to the "Off World"?

Blade Runner negotiates another aspect of the immigrant dilemma: the aliens' historically demonstrated ability to enrich Us/US. The underlying logic of the open door policy and the grain of truth at the heart of the melting pot myth is that immigrants have contributions to make, beyond their immediate exploitability, contributions that can make Us better. "I've seen things you people wouldn't believe," Roy tells Deckard near the end of the film when, after winning their battle to the death, he inexplicably saves his pursuer's life. But we will never know what they have seen or what they might have to offer once we close the door. From that perspective, Their deportation is Our loss. This is nowhere more poignantly stated than in Roy's speech just before he dies the time-controlled death his genetic creator scheduled for him. Everything he knows, the sum of his experience, "All those moments," he says, "will be lost in time . . . like tears in rain."

Blade Runner exposes the human cost of the new nativism. By seeing the Alien Other in human terms, it once again forces consideration of how the long-range aims of immigration reform in this country conflict with the nation's cherished humanitarian ideals. True to one side of its generic roots, the *film noir*, in the end *Blade Runner* ruminates on the existentially inexplicable, raising more questions than its futuristic private investigator — or we as a society — are able to answer. Watching Roy "retire," Deckard sums it up in a sober voice-over: "All he wanted were the same answers the rest of us wanted — Where do I come from? Where am I going? How long have I got?"

The new immigrants, documented and undocumented, seek answers to the same questions. So do we. Can we, should we, allow the new immigrants "more life"? Deckard's escape with his lover, the Replicant Rachel, to a place where the difference between human and Replicant is meaningless, suggests the need to create a space for that alternative.

Aliens: Two Kinds of Mothering

Aliens is a film about mothers. In contrasting two maternal figures, Ripley/Sigourney Weaver, a nurturing "mother" of a space colony orphan, and the Alien queen mother, a mechanically efficient reproducing machine, it raises an intriguing question, as one critic put it, "How can a film both support and fear mothering?"¹⁷ My own answer is that two different kinds of mothering are opposed: the First World, enlightened, "civilized" one, and the Third World, "primitive" one.

In terms of its depiction of women, *Aliens* is just as conflicted as *The Terminator*, though in quite another way. On the one hand it is progressive (not to mention refreshing) to have a female SF protagonist who saves the world from the monsters from outer space. Particularly if she is a woman like Ripley: bright and pragmatic, cool, resourceful, tough. And she is allowed personal growth. Ripley, the "new woman" in *Alien*, becomes the "new mother" in *Aliens*, and once again provides positive feminine imagery: she survives as a single mother in a man's world with an adopted child. Still, there is plenty in the film to offset the positive.

What is distressing about *Aliens* from my point of view, is, first, its horrifying depiction of Alien (read Third World) motherhood. The giant Alien queen mother, the most foreboding monster in either film, is terrifying enough, but when

it is so sharply contrasted with Ripley, the "civilized" mother, it has chilling implications. Limiting the analysis to Ripley, *Aliens* can pat itself on the back for its progressive leanings, Ripley being independent, caring, and responsible. But consider, as opposed to her, the Alien mother, down in her birth chamber, reproducing mindlessly, endlessly. She is a monster out of the nativists' worst nightmares, procreation gone mad, uncontrollable and unstoppable. Ripley's unforgettable cry, "Get away from her, you bitch," defends First World mothering at the expense of the Third World womanhood. In this light, the fact that a woman wipes out the Alien mother and her offspring is hardly cause for rejoicing. The film's positive feminist elements are overwhelmed by its imperialistic underpinnings.

It is not coincidental, I think, that Ripley becomes more resourceful and self-sufficient as the Alien menace heightens. The film will not allow Ripley's more liberated definition of womanhood to exist on its own terms, but only as a dialectical element, in direct opposition to the female Alien that threatens the existence of the human race. In outer space, with the survival of the race on the line, Ripley's portrayal of mothering is positive, especially when it is pitted against a perpetually procreating feminine Other. What awaits Ripley back on Earth, though? She will likely be dismissed as a "hysterical woman," just as she was at the beginning of the film, and likely return to the same menial job she had been given. The feminism in *Aliens* is situational, opportunistic, and relative.

As is its condemnation of Capitalism in the person of the villainous Burke, the duplicitous Company man. One possible reading of the film's treatment of the treacherous Burke is a condemnation of Capitalism. To me Burke seems more like the traditional stereotype of the capitalist businessman so common to film and television. Ostensibly, this stereotype is used to critique the system, but actually deflects a more penetrating appraisal. One of the most popular narratives in popular media is the story of "bad" businessmen who receive their comeuppance, thereby conveniently shifting the blame to aberrations, in the form of corrupt individuals, rather than on the system that spawned them. Besides, Burke represents not clever Capitalism so much as he does stupid greed. His error is one of discernment. He fails to see that the profit motive must take a back seat when survival of the status quo is on the line. Burke's fatal flaw is not his belief in the free market system but rather his failure to recognize that for Capitalism to operate it must first of all exist. He is a villain not because he is a Capitalist, but because he is a short-sighted one: he fails to see that what is called for is a combination of Capitalism and nativism's other face, isolationism — economic and biological Darwinism. With the death of Burke, Capitalism does not suffer but in fact survives. It awaits Ripley on Earth, safe and unmolested.

By boiling everything, feminism, Capitalism, mothering, down to a survivalist essence, *Aliens* demonstrates how extreme — and extremely conservative — measures can become natural in the face of the Alien threat. Ideologically, Ripley moves in just the opposite direction from Sarah in James Cameron's first film, *The Terminator*. Whereas Sarah shifts from a vague and uncommitted centrist position leftward, Ripley moves from left to right. Her political turning point comes, I think, in the scene (in this film the sex scene) in which she is instructed by a marine on modern weaponry. By the end of the film, when a low-angle shot captures Ripley emerging from the cargo bay, transformed into a superhuman fork-lift prepared to do battle with the Alien Mother (it is here that Ripley calls her "Bitch!") the right has won



First world mother in *Aliens*

Ripley's soul. She has become a female Rambo in space.

When it comes down to life and death, progressivism, feminism and Third Worldism are quickly jettisoned political luxuries.

The Dangers of Symbolic Distortion

If these and other SF films are ways in which we as a society have been working through our immigration worries, there are a number of salient implications — all of them disturbing, some more than others. One, of course, is political. Unrestricted by mere planetary limits, American capitalism has bypassed multinationalism and leapt ahead to galaxy-wide proportions. Cultural imperialism evident in these films leaves no doubt that multinational capitalism — based on the American model — is the universal norm. "Mainstream SF's articulation of resemblance between aliens and humans," Vivian Sobchack says,

perserves the subordination of "other worlds, other cultures, other species" to the world, culture, and "speciality" of white American culture. We can see this new American "humanism" literally expand into and colonize outer space, making it safe for democracy, multinational capitalism, and the Rolling Stones.³⁸

Thus the Alien in *Starman* arrives on Earth singing the Rolling Stones' "Satisfaction" and the Aliens in *Explorers* (1986, Joe Dante) are idiots, who speak the language of American sit-com TV.

Galaxy-wide cultural imperialism may only be a first step toward actual imperialism through military involvement. Seen through the aliens=Aliens lens, a film like *Aliens* may be seen as a metaphor for US involvement in the Third World, specifically Latin America. The fit seems too neat to dismiss. The need to go There (a Company colony) before They invade Here is the film's underlying narrative logic. The need to help stop Them is strong enough in *The Last Starfighter* that in the end the young human pilot volunteers to leave Earth and join the intergalactic fight for freedom.

But it is the distortion of the alien immigrant into an Alien Other, and in the case of the Hispanic, the shift from ethnic stereotype to outer space creature that raises the most distressing set of problems. Some stereotyping researchers have looked at the role of social perception and stereotyping as an important way to understand wide-scale, socially destructive behaviours (on the order of magnitude of genocide, for example, or the Holocaust). A starting hypothesis bearing on such horrible kinds of dehumanization is "that when members of one group think about members of another as intrinsically different — as categorically bad, unworthy, despicable — they are capable of inflicting great harm upon them." In this view, stereotyping constitutes "sanctions for evil," working to reduce restraint, and "may induce or justify acts that would be unthinkable to commit against members of one's own group."³⁹ In this light, the transformation of the alien immigrant into a non-human SF Other, most especially in the shape of a Destructive Monster, has frightful ramifications. Since we are all prone to stereotyping, "the participation in atrocities, to the extent that these are facilitated by stereotypes of the enemy or outgroup, is within the repertoire of many of us — bystanders, at least, if not as perpetrators."⁴⁰ Dehumanization and stereotyping intersect at the point at which there is a loss of uniqueness and individuality. As one social psychologist — a survivor of the Holocaust — put it:

When a group of people is defined entirely in terms of a category to which they belong, and when this category is

excluded from the human family, then the moral restraints against killing them are more readily overcome.⁴¹

And indeed, one researcher's investigation of the My Lai massacre in Vietnam has noted how US soldiers referred to people that were killed as "animals," "subhuman," and "insects."⁴²

I am not making a doomsday prediction, only remarking upon some of the more destructive features of stereotyping that, I think, we need to be aware of. Siegfried Kracauer, in *From Caligari to Hitler*, his classic study of German cinema of the pre-Nazi era, never made what is for me the crucial link between the monsters of German Expressionist cinema and the Jews. In his discussion of the German monster films of his day, such as *The Golem* (1914, Henrik Galeen and Paul Wegener; other versions remade in 1917 and 1920, both directed by Wegener) and the six-part serial *Homunculus* (1916, Otto Rippert), both dealing with artificially created, destructive beings, Kracauer sees them as demonstrations of "a theme that was to become an obsession in the German cinema": the split in the German psyche between the horrible and the powerful. But he never ventures beyond that to speculate what is most obvious: that those same monsters — particularly the Golem, which is a monster arising out of the Jewish ghetto, brought to life by a rabbi — are projections of a socially unconscious dread of the Jew.⁴³ From a completely different starting point, Vivian Sobchack comes back to very nearly the same conclusion in her analysis of American SF films 50 years later. "The once threatening SF 'alien,' and Other" she writes, "become our familiars — our close relations, if not ourselves." She sees new SF Aliens as mostly non-hostile (a problematic proposition because in about half of the latest SF films they *are* hostile), and offers the proposition "that the 'aliens R US.'"⁴⁴ Though I agree with the way in which she sees conservative, mainstream SF as preserving the dominance of "other worlds" (particularly her slant on cultural imperialism in the post-modern world which I mentioned above), still there is a demonstrable difference between human and Alien in both the marginal and the mainstream SF that she discusses, an important and distorted difference. In seeing the difference between human and monster as only an internal schism (as Kracauer does), or as post-modern evidence of the strains within late capitalism (as Sobchack does), the distortion is neglected. By so doing, Kracauer never brings up the obvious fact about *The Golem*: the possibility that the creature that arises out of the Jewish ghetto is a fearful symbol of the Jew, one that must somehow be crumbled into dust, just as the Golem is at the climax of that film. Similarly, there are implications that arise out of the distortion of the Hispanic that are too frightening to brush over.

My purpose here is not to change the mental process of stereotyping (which is probably impossible) so much as to expose it. "The goal of studying stereotypes," says Sander Gilman, "is not to stop the production of images of the Other, images that demean and, by demeaning, control . . . We need these stereotypes to structure the world."⁴⁵ What is important to remember is that in constructing Others, a society defines itself. The shape of those Others can reveal a wide range of constantly shifting social, political, and psychological tendencies. The SF Alien as immigrant Hispanic reveals a significant amount of stress within the dominant ideology. Cultural tensions about immigrants, coupled with psychological guilt and fear, together with doubts about national identity combine to produce, as they have done in other times in our history, xenophobia, isolationism, and nativism. What is different — and what I wish to make us

aware of — is the current cinematic shape of that fear: fear that transforms the greaser bandit into a terminating cyborg, the dark lady into a fertile, black Alien mother, menacingly reproducing monsters down in her lair.

Endnotes

1. In this paper I will use the capitalized form "Alien" to designate the science fiction movie creature, and the lower case form "alien" to designate immigrants.
2. Vivian Sobchack summarizes a few of the more interesting speculations about the Alien Other in *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film* (New York: The Ungar Publishing Co., 1987) 36; 47.
3. Judith Hess Wright, "Genre Films and the Status Quo," *Jump Cut*, (May-June 1974): 1, 16, 18; rpt. in *Film Genre Reader*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University Texas Press, 1986) 46.
4. Peter Biskind, *Seeing Is Believing* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983) 111. Jim Naureckas, "Aliens: Mother and the Teeming Hordes," *Jump Cut* 32:4.
5. Sobchack 241.
6. Peter Fitting, "Count Me Out/In: Post-Apocalyptic Visions in Recent Science Film," *CineAction!* 11 (Winter '87-'88): 42-51.
7. Robin Wood, "An Introduction to the American Horror Film," in *Movies and Methods, Volume II*, ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) 199.
8. Wood 199-200.
9. Wood 201.
10. James Stuart Olson, *The Ethnic Dimension in American History*, Vol. II (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979) 206. "Growth of a Nation," *Time* 8 July 1985: 34-35, gives a figure of 8.8 million for the decade.
11. Otto Friedrich, "The Changing Face of America," *Time* 8 July 1985: 26-7.
12. U.S. Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization Service, *1985 Statistical Yearbook of the Immigration and Naturalization Service*: 176.
13. Olson 379. For the *bracero* programme, see Wayne A. Cornelius, *Mexican Migration to the United States: Causes, Consequences, and U.S. Responses* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Center for International Studies, 1978) 18; Leonard Dinnerstein and David M. Reimers, *Ethnic Americans*, 2d ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1982) 93. Olson 384-385. On the 1965 Immigration Act, see Leonard Dinnerstein, Roger L. Nichols and David M. Reimers, *Natives and Strangers: Ethnic Groups and the Building of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979) 258-259; Olson 384.
14. U.S. Department of Justice 166-169; 178-179.
15. Dinnerstein, et. al., *Natives and Strangers* 112.
16. Anya Peterson Royce, *Ethnic Identity: Strategies of Diversity* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982) 163-167.
17. Royce 160.
18. John Higham, *Patterns of American Nativism, 1980-1925* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers University Press, 1955) 3-4; 9.
19. *The Poems of Emma Lazarus*, Vol. I (Boston: 1889) 202-203, qtd. in Higham 23.
20. "Congress Clears Overhaul of Immigration Law," *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, 99th Congress, Second Session, 1986: 61-67, provides a good description of the features of the law and a concise outline of its congressional history. Interestingly, one of the major obstacles preventing a quicker passage of the bill was a capitalistic dilemma emblematic of the larger, contradictory nature not just of immigration reform, but of the whole immigration question in the US. In the hopes of discouraging the entry of undocumented aliens by making it harder for them to find work in the US, one of the goals of the bill was to provide tougher legislation to punish Americans who hired undocumented aliens. But at the same time the law had to find a way to placate Western growers, who for decades (since the end of the *bracero* programme in 1964) had depended on undocumented workers to pick their crops. The built-in advantages for the growers — a cheap, reliable and disposable labour pool — was clearly jeopardized by the new legislation. To insure the bill's passage, the growers had to be assured that the new law would allow them to maintain an adequate work force.
21. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1981) 20.
22. Claude Levi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth," qtd. in Thomas G. Schatz, *Hollywood Genres* (New York: Random House, 1979) 262.
23. Fitting 48.
24. See, for example, Walter G. Stephan and David Rosenfield, "Racial and Ethnic Stereotypes," in *In the Eye of the Beholder*, ed. Arthur G. Miller (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1982) 106.
25. Wright 47-48.
26. Wood, "An Introduction," 203.
27. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (New York: Avon Books, 1969) 175.
28. Freud 177-178.
29. Freud 301.
30. Higham 162.
31. Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985) 15-21.
32. Gilman 21.
33. Mark Winokur, "Improbable Ethnic Hero: William Powell and the Transformation of Ethnic Hollywood," *Cinema Journal* 27: 12.
34. Anders Stephanson, "Regarding Postmodernism — A conversation with Fredric Jameson," *Social Text* 17 (Fall 1987): 43.
35. Francis A. Walker, qtd. in Higham: 143.
36. Earlier in the film another Replicant asks Deckard the same question. Right before he tries to kill Deckard, Leon pauses for a moment to ask, "Painful to live in fear, isn't it?" It is at this point that Rachel kills Leon and saves Deckard's life.
37. Naureckas 1.
38. Sobchack 297.
39. Arthur G. Miller, "Stereotyping: Further Perspectives and Conclusions," in *In the Eye of the Beholder* 479-480; 483.
40. Miller 481.
41. Herbert Kelman, qtd. in Miller 481.
42. Miller 480.
43. Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler* (1947, rpt. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974) 32.
44. Sobchack 229; 289.
45. Gilman 240.

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Aping Africa:

The Mist of Immaculate Miscegenation



by Diane Sippl

There are two ways to lose oneself: by segregation in the particular or by dilution in the 'universal.'

Aime Cesaire
Lettre a Maurice Thorez, 1956

A woman will only have the choice to live her life either *hyperabstractly* ('immediately universal,' Hegel said) in order thus to earn divine grace and homologation with symbolic order; or merely *different*, other, fallen ('immediately particular,' Hegel said). But she will not be able to accede to the complexity of being divided, of heterogeneity, of the catastrophic-fold-of-'being' ('never singular,' Hegel said).

Julia Kristeva
"Stabat Mater"
Tales of Love, 1983

A man who has language . . . possesses the world expressed

and implied by that language . . . Mastery of language affords remarkable power."

Frantz Fanon
Black Skin, White Masks, 1967

In the elaborate press kit that Warner Brothers and Universal Pictures compiled for *Gorillas in the Mist*, director Michael Apted had no doubts: "There are three love stories . . . Dian and the animals, Dian and Bob Campbell, and Dian and Sembagare." When I saw the film I had doubts, the first time and every time thereafter — not about the apes and not about Campbell, because I had seen it coming: *Gorilla Girl Chooses Ape Over Man*, the latest aberration of Hollywood cinema. But what I hadn't foreseen and never in fact saw was *Ape Woman Loves African*. I feel spared, but also cheated. As I see it, the question the audience is left with at the end of the film is not the obvious one, "who's done it?" but really the question of "why?" The answer, though clear enough in biographical reports of Dian Fossey, is less obvious in the film than we might expect. "She must have been 'doing it' with the apes!" is the standing joke. But if every joke has its underlying fear, here it is the white woman's proximity to the racial Other, which is seen as a threat to Western control over post-colonial cultures.

Now it's clearer to me: the Production Notes, at least, offer

a crystal picture of Sembagare, "faithful tracker who was closer to Fossey than any white man and who saw her through the worst moments of her life, and the best." Apted himself tells us, "this part is the soul of the whole movie and if it is to work, Sembagare had (sic) to be authentic . . . Not that there aren't great black actors in Europe and America, but they've lost that feeling of being a part of the land." The notes go on to tell us that by the time *Gorillas* is released, the man "whose life will have gone through the most crucial changes" will be the actor who plays Sembagare, John Omerah Miluwi, a stranger to the world of movie-making until "that fateful day" that he would be paired with Sigourney Weaver. She, in turn, tells us,

The thing you feel right away with John is complete trust. You sense his dignity, his closeness with his surroundings and his understanding of nature. You feel the strength of character, and you would unhesitatingly put your life in his hands.

The patronizing tenor of this promotional material even goes beyond the so-called "personal" realm to the "social." The notes continue,

One of the strangest and most exciting thrills for Miluwi was traveling beyond Kenya for the first time — firstly (sic) to Rwanda and then, more extraordinary by far, to England. For Miluwi it was all a massive culture shock, but one this remarkably well adjusted man has made incredibly smoothly. His strength was always that he refused to be phased by the head-turning aspect of the whole experience. He held onto the *reality of going back to his mountain when all the excitement was over*. Which is exactly what he did (emphasis mine)

Another filmmaker, Trinh Minh-ha, who has in fact made films of Africa with an entirely different agenda, shares her oppositional point of view on the question of roots and authenticity, the question of the Other:

To persuade you that your past and cultural heritage are doomed to eventual extinction and thereby keeping you occupied with the Saviour's concern, inauthenticity is condemned as a *loss of origins* and a whitening (or faking) of non-Western values . . . you immediately react . . . and are thus led to stand in need of defending that very ethnic part of yourself that for years has made you and your ancestors the objects of execration. Today, planned authenticity is rife; as a product of hegemony and a remarkable counterpart of universal standardization, it constitutes an efficacious means of silencing the cry of racial oppression.¹

Either dilution into the universal, with the bleaching of difference, or segregation — into real or symbolic reservations, reserves, internment camps, ghettos: are these the "choices" for the racial Other in postcolonial life and its discourse? If so the analogy with the gendered Other is evident: "immediately universal . . . immediately particular . . . but never singular," Hegel said. Such claims commit an act of larceny, Barthes has observed, by myth's appropriation of what belongs to history.

Recent scholarship (at least four books published between 1986 and 1988) documents one more layer of the history behind the myths: colonial white women did *not* necessarily lead disengaged lives of leisure; from Fiji to India to Nigeria, between 1900 and 1960s, letters, memoirs, household management books, and novels shed other light on the women of Britain's empire. The myth, according to Karen Tranberg Hansen, is that when these privileged women arrived en masse from England, they brought down the edifice of race

relations because they drew the white sector inward, whereby it ignored the rise of indigenous political activity to the extent that it had trouble confronting the imminent end of the empire. The thread of truth here is that while white women may indeed have been a factor in the downfall, perhaps it was for the opposite reason — their stepping *out* of bounds.²

The popular lore of Dian Fossey in Zaire and Rwanda between 1963 and 1985 has it that she was *not* disposed to step out of the traditional boundaries of Empire. In fact in both the media and the academy she is said to have added to the image of the "Ugly American" in ways far more distasteful than *Gorillas* suggests. She is reported to have been a severe victim of bronchitis, alcoholism, and mental collapse.³ Yet in 1988 she figured in Hollywood as a heroine charismatic enough to command unending negotiations and capital for the production and promotion of *Gorillas in the Mist*. Why?

In 1985 Sidney Pollack had taken the West "out" of Africa via the narrative of a white woman who couldn't make ends meet in terms of money *or* men and found in Kenya only the muse's inspiration of the "shadows on the grass" (the Africans . . .). In the context of women's imaging in Hollywood cinema, that film is already an anachronism — of the '70s decade when women were once again entering the screen's frame of work outside the home and becoming more admirable and desirable, often enough, as their lives derived meaning from their labour. Work may have been seen as proble-



The white woman's burden: *Out of Africa*

matic in the language of such texts, but it was at least a forceful enough issue to be structured into the central conflict of these films.⁴ Dian Fossey may *appear* to be miles down the road of gender-role "liberation" from Karen Blixen/Isak Dinesen, delicate damsel obsessed with her fetishes of fine living (including Farah's white gloves), fragile victim of colonialism ("china — it can break"). It is Fossey *herself* who enters into both wonderment and combat with the African "wild," who finds a man who does his *own* sewing, and pursues *her* unrequited love, and returns *alive* from his flight over the mountains, with a proposal of marriage, no less, and must leave her to *her* mission of a higher order.

With *Gorillas in the Mist* in 1988, Michael Apted has not only taken women back to the home, but he has also taken us "back" to Africa, with all its attending exoticism. In other words, to the extent that for Western females it is "dangerous" to stray so "far from home," speaking within the socio-political economy, for the Western man it is a duty. These are old taboos and old imperatives — as old as the Oedipal

narrative and the myth of the Dark Continent. Together they are used in defense against the ultimate fear bridging both — miscegenation, real or symbolic, as a potential power alignment figuring a double castration.

The following analysis will provide clues to the ways *Gorillas in the Mist* negotiates the contemporary syndrome of postcolonial anxiety by examining language, both past and present, in the discourse of imperialism and the text of the film.

Mary Louise Pratt, in reviewing travel narratives of Western "visitors" to Africa in the late 18th and 19th centuries, finds in them an interplay of discourses. European penetration and appropriation is semanticized in at least three distinct ways, one of which is the "sentimental narrative," in which the visitor emerges not only as the ostensible narrator but also as the protagonist of heroic dramas. The journey becomes an epic of trials and strange, often erotic, encounters. Indigenous peoples enter into the experience of, even direct contact with, the traveler. Pratt contends that the attributes of this "experiential" type of narrative often allow for credibility and equality in the voice of the Other, but it is interesting to ask just who would comprise this Other in *Gorillas*. Says Pratt:

relations with the Other are governed by a desire for reciprocity and exchange. Estrangement and repulsion are presented as entirely mutual and equally irrational on both sides. Parody and self-parody abound . . . this discourse does not explicitly seek a unified, authoritative speaking subject. The subject here is split simply by virtue of realizing itself as both protagonist and narrator . . . the self sees, it sees itself seeing, it sees itself being seen. And always it parodies both itself and the Other.³

Upon reading Pratt's passage it is easy to recall the tribal fetishes of the Batwa made with Fossey's hair, as well as both her mocking "self-portraits" in red nail polish on the trunks of the great hagenia trees and her red-haired Halloween masks. But it is not the parodied Batwa who constitutes the Other in this discourse.

And, in fact, it is not so easy to read Fossey as the split subject of self-parody as it is to see her engaged in self-aggrandizing self-dramatization — all under the sign of aping Africa — which is really the character's self-impersonation of her own introjection. She becomes the spectacle of her acceptance of the "witchery" projected upon her, not by the Batwa but by a postfeminist filmic discourse, to which we shall return. But here it is also worth beginning to note the extent to which the apes enter a relation of parity with Fossey that the Africans do not. The many scenes of cross-mimicry between Fossey and "her" gorillas certainly do not permit the apes' escape from the gaze of the scientist; yet in at least one case an animal (Digit) commands the affection that a human (Sembagare) does not. Pratt interprets the "experiential voice" as an aspect of the introspective Individual in 19th-century Europe. In *Gorillas* I see this voice as an aspect of another structure that began to claim authority on the bourgeois Continent at the same time — the private sphere of the Family.

In several telling ways, Digit figures as Fossey's Adam in the Garden of Eden. If the Sumu doll, a sign of "Black Magic," is the symbolic serpent in the paradise of Rwanda's Parc des Volcans, then its meaning could be (mis)construed to be positing Fossey's "scientific" mission as the forbidden fruit that signifies irreversible punishment. But such a discourse of symmetry is not present in the narrative of *Gorillas*. The Batwa draw no identification from the

audience that would allow them this dialogic capacity. Instead they embody the myth of cannibals who butcher and devour; thus their fetish signals the common fate of Dian and Digit, slashed and dismembered for their sin, subjected to the hell of Africa.

What begins in *Gorillas* as an obsession with tracks in the mud of Mount Visoke, with neither humans nor animals in sight of each other, accelerates as a tale of excessive access which, paradoxically, both destroys and also sanctifies Fossey as scientist, as woman, and as colonizer.

As we shall see, this agenda is accomplished by reinstating the primacy of the nuclear family, with all its attending Christian mythology. The potential power in this alignment of woman/work/sight is undermined by the strategy to employ the sacrosanct family structure in a discourse of racism. It is through Fossey's privilege of "sight" in her work as a Western researcher that she carries out both her vicarious authority over territory, people, and property in Africa as well as her sex-role transgressions against the patriarchal family. The plot of the film salutes her for the former; it punishes her for the latter. If her characterization allows her "sight," it does not afford her "insight"; if, for instance, in her lover's National Geographic footage of her and Digit projected onto the walls of her cabin she sees herself as "seeing" and "seen," this self-image lies still within the Western male gaze of a dominant discourse.

Thus Fossey increasingly chooses the path of masculine violence deemed legitimate only under imperialism. And therefore she continually makes this choice not to defend herself or her fellow citizens or her state but, as Pratt detects in earlier visitors to Africa, "simply to get a look." In the film's plot Fossey is an animal behaviourist and her observation is supposedly cast upon the apes, but it is only in ideology that seeing can be an inherently innocent or passive practice. It is really *Rwanda* that is "under observation" in Fossey's "look," comprised of her policing and harassment of virtually every local African and their commercial "allies." Isn't it really *she* who is poaching upon the resources of *Africa*, thereby rationalizing American "surveillance" operations on all continents of the Third World today?

That the discourse of science — or the language of the film *Gorillas in the Mist* — can be understood as a system of subjection hinges upon the extent to which the Other has a voice in that discourse. For at least a century Western colonizers found ways of manipulating and counteracting the voices of African peoples in the interest of establishing a dominant "culture" whose authority would appear inherent and logical. This culture, according to Edward Said, draws upon its "elevated or superior position" for its power to "authorize, to dominate, to legitimate, demote, interdict, and validate: in short, the power of culture to be an agent of, and perhaps the main agency for, powerful differentiation within its domain and beyond it too." Within the narrative of *Gorillas*, the Fossey-Leakey voice ("I want to know who I am, and what it is that made me that way . . .") makes for a similarly lopsided discourse. What appears to give it a balance is the research "subject" — the apes. Fossey's skewed position in the film as God-like author of Knowledge and Civilization calls for the structured absence of Africans, who are supplanted by their mythic counterparts of those who must be conquered and converted, and by the structured presence of the apes.

This perverse configuration of time, place, and subject is tenable via the myth of the Dark Continent. Through it Rwanda becomes a no-woman's-land frozen in time and pas-

sable only by the embrace of a species discovered to be as docile as it is exotic — in this case, the Mountain Gorilla. The myth, over a century old, suffered an ironic genesis.

Britain's abolition of slavery, exploration of African land and resources, and advancement of anthropology as social science would seem, by some stretch of the imagination, to suggest a certain concrete knowledge of Africa that would be darkened only by a white conscience looking inward. But Patrick Brantlinger has recently observed that Africa grew "dark" only after it was flooded with European "light": that abolition really became the occasion for racism, and "humanitarian aims" really the stepping stone for imperialism. A language coded in altruism became enacted in colonialism and, what's more paradoxical, projected upon its own victim. Brantlinger writes,

By mid-century, the success of the anti-slavery movement, the impact of the great Victorian explorers, and the merger of racist and evolutionary doctrines in the social sciences had combined to give the British public a widely shared view of Africa that demanded imperialization on moral, religious, and scientific grounds. It is this view that I have called the myth of the Dark Continent.⁷

There were what I will call both arbitrary and strategic factors darkening the continent. When 41 Europeans died of malaria on the great Niger Expedition of 1841 and dozens of others were left sick and dispirited, the message came home to stay out of central Africa, and even the wisdom of Charles Dickens warned Britains to leave Africa "in the dark." By much the same logic, atrocities committed by European slave traders and owners in Africa as well as the West Indies and the American South were mapped onto the Africans themselves. Romantic poets at the beginning of the 19th century identified the European role of introducing "to an Edenic Africa those characteristic products of civilization: avarice, treachery, rapine, murder, warfare, and slavery."⁸ But after 1833 British abolitionists, in need of a new cause, found a way to displace the blame for slavery, first onto Americans and finally onto Africans, so as to create the need to "save" them.

Thus an Ashanti practice of offering humans to the gods, reported by Thomas Bowdich in 1819, was mythicized by Thomas Buxton in 1840 as a habit akin to slavery. If after the American Civil War the slave trade seemed conclusively African, "along with such staples of sensationalist journalism as human sacrifice and cannibalism, [it] looked more and more like a direct extension of African savagery."⁹

So we begin to note the more divisive ways of "darkening the continent," which would crystallize into myth the notion that the "savage customs" of the natives reduced them to unacceptable anarchy, precluding the one civilization of "true" religion and "progress" — i.e., "culture." Of course there are practical bases for such "knowledge." Britain's economic incentive in industrial competition with America made it convenient to label slavery as "immoral" once it was no longer lucrative on the Continent (possible in Britain's American colonies) and once enough capital for industrialism had been accumulated so that "explorers" were needed to scout out resources and labour in Africa as the new continent. In the explorers' eyes Africa looked "dark" because its potential labour pool (unspeakably brought up on British slavery) appeared lazy and greedy as opposed to "industrious." This unfortunate condition made obvious the need for power (to subject Africa's resources and labour to Britain) which gave rise to the academic discourse of race within evolutionary theory and epistemology.

The whole eruption of hegemonic language in abolitionist propaganda, explorers' non-fiction quest romances, scientists' published hierarchies, and gothic African adventure stories for boys supplied not only the Victorians but also, as of a few decades later, Hollywood, with a split image of African exoticism. For missionaries such as David Livingstone, Africans were weak, pitiable, inferior children who needed to be shown the "light." For explorers such as Henry Stanley, Africans were "dangerous obstacles" who needed to be subordinated and made fit for menial labour. Even vocabulary was subjected to the needs of imperialism.

Consider the moral basis for imperialism in-between-the-lines of Livingston's *Missionary Travels*: "[Africans are] inured to bloodshed and murder, and care for no god except being bewitched."¹⁰ We can recall *Gorillas*' relentless imaging of Rwandans of both stereotypes: there are the Batwan animists joyous in their primate slaughters, as well as the Kivu combat soldiers who shoot to terrorize Fossey out of the Congo; but there is also Sembagare, noble English-speaking savage, living in pastoral freedom and Christian innocence as domesticated St. Christopher in Fossey's mountain travels, yet bearing the machete, emblem of African doom, which is personified in the film's culminating scene as a Doppelgänger shadow on the wall. We also recall Fossey's ceaseless echo accusing the Batwa as "Murderers!" when apes are slain in service of the market economy. This so-called "murder" of animals by humans may draw its credibility from a source as old and self-righteous as Livingstone, but his messianic passion goes a long way in structuring the gorillas' "right to life" as an ethical issue in the film that takes the audience straight to the rationale for American "supervision" (or occupation or legislation) in Africa or on any other continent, all in the tradition of the need to Christianize and civilize. "The invention of needs goes hand in hand with the compulsion to help the needy, a noble and self-gratifying task that also renders the helper's service indispensable," writes Trinh Minh-ha in *Woman, Native, Other*. "The part of the saviour has to be filled as long as the belief in the problem of 'endangered species' lasts."

Fossey has a 1913 predecessor in May Crawford who, dwelling in Kenya, wrote in *By the Equator's Snowy Peak* that the "natives," "loving darkness rather than light," resent all that makes for progress.¹² If our postcolonial sensibility reads instead that these Africans resented all that made for intrusion, Hollywood would still have us see their self-defense of killing, capturing, and forcefully banishing missionaries as grounds for armed intervention and annexation — the political basis for imperialism. Brantlinger offers us a more sinister analog for Fossey in his quotation from an 1895 novel by Anthony Hope, *The God in the Car*. One character asks another, Lord Semingham, about the progress of his investments in central Africa. "Everything's going on very well," he replies. "They've killed a missionary." This might be "regrettable in itself," Semingham smiles, "but [it's] the first step towards empire." Need we wonder what the 1985 murder of Fossey was the first step toward?

Her characterization in the film, at least, suggests the economic basis for imperialism. Expeditionist Samuel White Baker predicted that "the African will assuredly relapse into an idle and savage state unless specially governed and forced by industry."¹⁴ Richard Burton, who took up the search for the source of the White Nile in 1856, was not concerned about the atrophy of Africans he found uncivilized in the first place. But in his eyes they were at least (and at best) good for clearing the land for British occupation, not unlike Fossey's dollar-a-day porters who trek up the mountains in caravans



Imperial violence and "backward" Africans

along buffalo trails to build her cabin, transport her staples, and play with her pets in the backyard. Their literary ancestors appear in a turn-of-the-century novel as porters who "hired themselves out like animals, and as the beasts of the field they did their work — patiently, without intelligence . . . Such is the African."¹⁵ Referred to as "dense and unambitious" beasts of burden, their real-life counterparts in King Leopold's Congo found the opportunity to enter Henry Stanley's forced labour camp. But Fossey's volunteer employees are merely incompetent: Sembagare pitches himself as the "best" of animal trackers, yet waits for Fossey to teach *him* how to look for gorillas, and the Parc Patrol officers gain access to poachers only *after* they have killed and mutilated half a dozen apes in one fell swoop.¹⁶

The fantasy of the facile African as malleable worker helped to recoup the lost authority of the former slaveholder that was a psychological seedbed for imperialism. Yet the film posits the majority of its Africans as far worse than tractable labourers; they are overt despoilers and debilitators, impeding Progress in the West as well as on their own turf. When Fossey's camp is raided by who-knows-who in the Congo and she reports to her mentor Leakey, "all my research has been destroyed," we get the message that African liberation movements are problematic for Americans. Batwa antelope trappers, as Fossey narrates their offscreen action, are compelled by their timeless destruction of Beauty and Knowledge, which she must counteract. "The Batwa did this!" she cries to Sembagare, who replies, "And their fathers and grandfathers before them . . ." to which Fossey quips, "And their sons and grandsons after them — *I don't think so* . . ." Fossey's downhill slide at the hands of poachers repres-

ents the "savage state" of Africans *not* "specifically governed" by successful postcolonial relations. The irony, of course, is that in *Gorillas* the poachers, Public Enemy Number One for world ecology, serve the Western capital enterprise — the Cologne Zoo and Mr. Van Vechten, as well as the neocolonial economy of Rwanda's tourist industry. But such commerce (the *only* one represented in the film) is "backward," and not "industrious," caging up anthropoids and shipping them off to die of exploitation; so Fossey continually finds occasion to teach the nation's leaders how to govern their people.

In interpreting this intervention, it is instructive to return to the discourse of travel narratives Pratt examines, this time to the "landscape narrative," to consider the intersection of information, land, and commerce. She writes,

In the body of the text, European enterprise is seldom mentioned, but the sight/site as textualized consistently presupposes a global transformation that, whether the I/eye likes it or not, is already understood to be underway. In scanning prospects in the spatial sense . . . this eye *knows itself* to be looking at prospects in the temporal sense — as possibilities for the future, resources to be developed, landscapes to be peopled or repeopled by Europeans.¹⁷

In *Gorillas* the entire temporal development of the narrative is the consequential drama of impending African revenge against Fossey for her trespassing, for her violation of the Rwandans' claim of territory. But the film doesn't structure this action as appropriation and transformation. From Fossey's point of view (which is also the camera's), this space is hers — or *should* be. In this point of view the spring traps the

Batwa construct, which Fossey and team are compelled to destroy, are symbolic of the human traps of African slave traders, and the antelope, his back broken, is emblematic of the noble savage, maimed by barbaric practices. In this audience point of view, Fossey's first encounter with the tribe takes on the configuration of a circle of Inquisitionists burning a witch at the stake ("Her hair is on fire," they tell each other), projected upon Africans as a ritual in which Fossey will be sacrificed and/or consumed with delight.

But rest assured, Fossey has a whole history of empire at her fingertips. Her call for international intervention in Rwanda is never made, but she and the audience have it in mind. It is the real dénouement of the film, left for the audience to enact.

"Upon this rock I shall build my . . . Karisoke Research Institute," Fossey might as well say at Mt. Visoke. Her staking of ground is disclosed to the audience in each voice-over address to Dr. Leakey of the encroachment of poachers upon "her" gorillas, of the reduced number in her last census, of the escalation of self-defense weaponry she purchases. Yet the film's text constructs the identification of audience with character on the basis of state terror, both ubiquitous and mystified in the film. "Dear Dr. Leakey . . . This time I have bought a gun . . . and if any civil war comes my way, it had better watch its ass . . ." she boasts, having been deported from Zaire in a civil war of which she hasn't the "foggiest" notion. This we hear against sweeping aerial surveys of the land, pungent in its hues, varied in its terrain, affording visible clarity of its "under"development.

Fossey's unthinkable ignorance is possible because her authority, as Pratt explains it,

emanates from an unknown site behind the speaking 'I' — behind the periphery of what is seen, from a seat of power that should probably be identified with the state . . . the current conception of the state as a form of public power separate from both ruler and ruled, constituted most basically by the exclusive right to exercise legitimate violence within a certain defined territory.¹⁸

Thus Fossey's proclaimed mission in Africa, the refinement of the Western knowledge edifice of natural history, as well as her unacknowledged agenda of refining the capitalist world system, allow her preferred focus to fall upon the Mountain Gorillas. This species' privileged position in the narrative permits Fossey to view the Rwandans and their body politic in terms of ethnography, abstracting them from their daily struggle on their own diminished land as farmers in a single-crop economy of an organic pesticide for Western Europe, from their own social and political history being made. The space of the Rwandans, then is repopulated with a more governable body that returns Fossey's gaze, echoes her words, accepts her caress — the apes.¹⁹

At this point it is worth examining the means by which the apes, too, are abstracted from history and re-situated in an evolutionary anthropology as lying somewhere *within* and not *before*, a developmental hierarchy of Africans. In 1863 James Hunt's Anthropological Society held that the Negro was a distinct species, and not a race of humans. Darwin and social Darwinism afforded a more liberal view: Africans were simply a separate and inferior "breed" of human beings. At the same time research on anthropoid apes permitted Thomas Henry Huxley's seemingly progressive view that Africans were indeed not some kind of sub-human link between advanced apes and civilized humans; but this "discovery" was coloured by his digressions reporting tribal

claims of kinship with apes and 16th-century Portuguese tales of cannibalism, a topic that emerged in the discourse of Africa *not* during centuries of slavery but at the onset of imperialism. The narrative development in *Gorillas* follows this historical trajectory: the more dominated the Africans, the more savage they appear.

Brantlinger writes, "The theory that men evolved through distinct social stages — from savagery to barbarism to civilization — led to a self-congratulatory anthropology that actively promoted belief in the inferiority — indeed the bestiality — of the African."²⁰ And so in 1889 George Roman's *Mental Evolution in Man* interchanged the words "savage," "pre-historic man," and "gorilla" vis a vis the word "gentleman" in such a way that the first three actually formed a hierarchy, with the savage at the base of the evolutionary scale and the gorilla closest to approaching civilization. The scale, seen as a "natural but static chain of excellence,"²¹ once again parallels degrees of capacity for subjection, so in fact it locates the modern "savage" *below* the starting point of social evolution.

The racist premise of *Gorillas* can be traced to Charles Darwin himself, who concluded his book, *The Descent of Man* with the statement that he would prefer being related to a baboon than to a savage, "who delights to torture his enemies, offers up bloody sacrifices without remorse . . . knows no decency, and is haunted by the grossest superstitions."²²

There is something satisfying to our contemporary fantasies of both Africa and women in seeing Fossey herself "go native." As she turns to terror tactics and torture, her body is a screen for none of the "coolness" of her white male counterparts — neither Leakey's aloofness nor Van Vechten's hardened savvy — but for the torrid metamorphosis from maternity to madness. The first time she catches the poachers in the act, Fossey hits the warpath. She snatches an African youth by the collar and manhandles him: she shakes him, throws him down, and hits him. The cut, to a close-up of a Snickers candy bar, brings the words, "I believe you're a good boy, and I have lovely goodies here for a such a good boy." But he resists her coercion. "*Tie him!*" thunders Fossey, and off-screen her voice projects the roar of a lion, which on-screen assumes the image of a Batwa witch in full-head mask.

The next time an ape is killed — her beloved Digit — Fossey's face becomes its own mask "going native" (a perverse reversal of Fanon's "black skin, white masks") to the extent that, by virtue of its expression and the camera angle, her face bears a striking resemblance to that of the silverback ape in "charging" intruders into his patriarchy. Under the Western male gaze of Africa, a solitary drumbeat. A noose falls into the screen's frame from above. Fossey puts the poacher's head into it. She kicks away the chair he stands on, rips off his necklace, pockets the fetish. "*Tell him he no longer has his courage or his men!*" extorts Fossey. It is a *mock* lynching. But for all its "Africa" emblems in sound and image, it is a symbolic castration of anyone more "African" than Fossey. Her torching of the Batwa grass huts is none other than the hellfire of the jungle.

Fossey's link to Africa, her authority, comes to be seated in the apes. When she gloats of her pistol-whipping of tourists in the gorilla park, our frame for her action is the need of self-defense. The apes, after all, figure as a "higher species" than the Africans, if for no better reason than that they cooperate with Knowledge (Others being classified and named and thereby "known" in the Todorovian sense) and with the camera as its source. Enhancing Western research

rather than threatening it, the apes physically embrace the camera, wanting to know it as a vehicle through which to see themselves, with the same human capacity for self-knowledge manifest in Leakey. As researcher Fossey becomes more and more consumed with getting her work "recorded" rather than completed, Knowledge enters History through the camera's language. As photojournalist Bob Campell shoots footage of the gorillas, one of them takes hold of the focus himself and peers into the lens to get a look. Fossey meanwhile takes a snapshot of the ape's mirror gaze, and the animal kisses the lens, a performance which, all-in-all, shows up as the spectacle of "research" in Fossey's home-movie screening in her cabin, with its two-person audience seated in the bath tub.

"Why am I in this movie so much?" squeaks Fossey from beneath the bubbles, as *Gorillas* asks the question self-reflexively. "Cuz you're the story — You're what people are interested in" retorts Campbell. "I'm the Gorilla Girl," she resolves, and she is liable to have gorillas bridesmaids in her wedding, suggests her human mate. But Fossey enjoys this syllogism.

Dr. Leakey warns her about failed scientific objectivity should she get too close to her subject. But as Fossey grunts and glowers, picks her hair and beats her chest to mime the apes, aping becomes the site of self-knowledge, which means knowledge as an ape, in ape language. "I think they're quite confused as to my species," she reports, reminding us that the dictionary defines the word "anthropoid" as both "apes resembling man" and "man resembling apes." The film's text ennobles Fossey for emulating the apes: her first sight of them attributes the animals themselves with any production of the meaning "Majestic Africa." They are shot from an extremely low angle with a suspenseful void of sound yielding to music that has pre-packaged our emotions as fear and awe; with the reaction shots of Dian and Sembagare, we feel the God-like presence of the gorillas. Much later in the plot Fossey shares her perception with her students upon their first sight of the apes: "Look around you . . . This is as close to God as you get . . ." If for no other reason this kitsch sentimentality resonates in the film because of its political repercussions. "Gorillas don't know borders. They don't need passports," Fossey deduces. "Her" apes are transcendent, and as "ape," she is unbound.

In his book, *Myth, Literature, and the African World*, Wole Soyinka reminds us of the persistence of the discourse of imperialism in our postmodern world:

We black Africans have been blandly invited to submit ourselves to a second epoch of colonization — this time by a universal-humanoid abstraction defined and conducted by individuals whose theories and prescriptions are derived from the apprehension of their world and their history, their social neuroses and their value systems.²³

If we no longer can assume acquiescence and silence on the part of the Other, what might Africans be telling us about our language and ourselves as the victims and perpetrators of Hollywood hegemony? Brantlinger has shown how the Dark Continent turned into a mirror, "reflecting what the Victorians wanted to see — heroic and saintly self-images — but (also) casting ghostly shadows of guilt and regression."²⁴

Dian Fossey's career in Africa spanned the American Civil Rights Movement, the rise of Castro's Cuba, the Vietnam War, numerous "hostage crises" in the Middle East, not to mention the overthrow of the Shah of Iran, the Nicaraguan Revolution, the Grenada Invasion, and, first of all, the formation of Zaire from the Belgian Congo. For some reason

not stated in the film's narrative exposition, she left her job in California with handicapped children and took up a new life in the volcanic rain forests of central Africa, to live relatively alone. She stayed there over 20 years. In her own sparse publications outside her magazine and television coverage by the National Geographic Association, she had few words for Africans.²⁵

What did she see in her mirror gaze? Perhaps a newly emerging woman seeking an alternative to American "civilization" in the primitive paradise of Mt. Visoke? Her time period in this country was gaining mythic power in the media as an era of "drop-outs" from establishment politics, capital, and family life, whether we conjure her as a Beat, a Hippie, or an advocate of "Women's Lib." What can we read in her single-handed war against the Batwa tribesmen and their "collaborators"?

Dominique Mannoni theorizes that in the Western unconscious the savage is identified with a "certain image of the instincts . . . and civilized man is painfully divided between the desire to 'correct' the 'errors' of the savages and the desire to identify himself with them in his search for some lost paradise (a desire which at once casts doubt upon the merit of the very civilization he is trying to transmit to them)."²⁶ Because *Gorillas in the Mist* constructs two basic sets of Africans — the savage Batwa and the transcendent apes — Fossey as a character can gratify both desires, to rehabilitate the Batwa and to ape the apes in their harmonious habitat, with no conflict at heart. If so, then where do we place the character of Sembagare in Fossey's psyche? As little more than a theatrical spear-carrier in the worst tradition of "Africa" melodramas, he ostensibly serves the text to reproduce and cushion the desires and fears of his "master," as if to carry her emotional baggage. If he adds light to her colonizer's halo, he also casts her in the shadow of regression. Sembagare is problematic in the film, because he is not easily reduced to either pole of the text's dichotomy for Africans. Fossey's quest for language and acceptance not among real Africans, imaged in the film as savages, but among real apes, imaged as noble Africans, is not structured in the film as the '60s search for a lost innocence; instead it is articulated as an '80s struggle to re-create the family. And Sembagare, Fossey's Doppelgänger, is pivotal here.

It is useful to reconsider some of the theoretical assumptions that view the gaze in narrative film as gendered male due to its positioning within a male Oedipal frame. This code bears acceptance of Freud's account of the genesis of female sexuality as the "learned foregoing of active desire." The female story does not hold up as narrative and is replaced by the tale of how girls become women by embodying the goals and rewards of the male development quest. Therefore in films deploying the male gaze, female desire is passive, non-existent, or problematic. Films of feminist vision foreground female desire and characterize it as "active" and as "actively gazing."

Naomi Scheman challenges the contention that earlier Hollywood films have broken with the normative pattern of the male gaze through her thesis that a "double state of motherlessness (neither having one nor being one) is requisite for the heroines." She also finds that in certain Hollywood melodramas a gaze that may seem decidedly female is really "stuntedly feminist" because it is conscribed by a masculinist world via the gaze's incompatibility with maternity.²⁷ The motherlessness of the heroine is the vehicle for the male framing of the desiring female gaze as well as the key to audience pleasure.

In the Freudian Oedipal scene a woman has matured by repressing attachment to her mother and identifying her father as her true parent, and by learning how to repeat this behaviour pattern — how to desire according to external demands, to keep desire both replaceable and passive. If she once wished for a penis, she comes to wish a child, or passive sexual fulfillment by another's sexual activity, or at least *passive fantasized fulfillment by another's fantasized activity*. The latter, I contend, is the kernel of audience pleasure in *Gorillas in the Mist*. The film's text, framed by the quintessential narrative of the Oedipal myth and Freud's reading of it, hinges on the obedience of the heroine to the masculine code and her transgressions against it, finding a comfortable resolution in the mystification of maternity embedded in Christian mythology.

If in the Oedipal complex female gender identity is a matter of questioning both origins (female genesis in relation to a father) and sexual identity (femaleness as a re-orientation of desire), Fossey's self-knowledge is grounded in the paternal Dr. Leakey. Only as "fathered" can Fossey claim both her social empowerment (in this case, through her work) and her sexual identity (to the extent that it is feminine). Thus Leakey is "provider" for daughter Dian — not in the obvious sense of offering her professional position, but in the both mystical and mundane sense of paying for her cigarettes and candy bars, lipstick and shampoo, not to mention the edifice of *National Geographic* behind him, from which she asks to be reimbursed for her nail polish and hair dryer. Let alone his manly mention of Fossey's fiancé, Leakey reveals his position of masculine rivalry even with the apes. When Fossey writes that the silverback (patriarch of an ape family) never takes his eyes off her, Leakey retorts, "The male silverback can be extremely dangerous . . . I urge you to keep your distance." Fossey's character is often a blatant object of the male gaze: she agonizes when deprived of showers or braziers, and she renews her work permit by batting her eyelashes. But she also appears strangely masculine, stalking the mountains with endless stamina, wrestling rifles from soldiers' arms. These superficial gestures give way, however, to a more serious suggestion of androgyny in the character.

Scheman explains that while within the systems of male privilege under Oedipal mythology, neither a woman's "appropriately feminine sexual identity nor her ability to assume public power is compatible with her being her mother's daughter, what is . . . compatible with her having been mothered is her mothering."²⁸ Theoretically, heroines as mothers under the male gaze can only be structured as absent, effectively speaking. But *Gorillas* would appear to flirt with danger here. Parthenogenetic father that Leakey is, both Fossey and Roz Carr are parthenogenetic mothers, of nature and human alike. Carr is an Earth Mother — of the six-foot plants that flood her garden, swarming butterflies — but Fossey's "mother" as well. An American, she has a history of nursing American "daughters" who come to Rwanda to do everything *but* have their appendices removed. Fossey flees to her upon deportment from the Congo and finds her vine-covered haven, lawn striped with rosebushes and lights glowing in the windows, as Gretel finds a gingerbread house in the evil forest. "Good God, what happened to you, child?" sighs Carr in embracing her Prodigal Daughter, "There's always war and poverty here . . . Sometimes I think I'll leave. I never really decided to stay. But each time I come up for air it's Spring, and I'm planting again . . . This is my home."

Fossey offers a similar home, as a comparable Earth Mother, to the trapped and wounded Pucker, her baby

gorilla daughter that she nurses back to health. The home — its green walls, amber cupboards, potbelly fireplace, kettle on the stove, patchwork quilt, lullaby music, framed ape portraits, and wooden playpen filled with dirt and plants — is an anthropoid sanctuary for Mom and Pop, Pucker and Puppy, who all embrace at once when Campbell returns. But as Dian and daughters peer at themselves in the home movies on the wall and Campbell announces, "I've asked my wife for a divorce," we notice that none of the three families (his with his wife, his with Fossey, or Fossey's with apes) is complete in the traditional framework. "The right man is the one who, because of the nature of *his* desire for *her*, has a claim on her," Scheman reminds us.²⁹

But Fossey does not choose to marry Campbell and bear his children, nor even to move to Borneo with him and continue to bear his camera gaze; she chooses to remain tied to her anthropoid children in Rwanda. And, according to Freud, a woman who refuses to weaken her maternal power is punished. Ironically, Fossey's rejection of Campbell is followed by the betrayal and severing of female, mother-daughter bonds. To the extent that Pucker accepts her "mother" as powerful in her own right and *regards* her as phallic (Queen of the Jungle), Pucker must be crated off (by "father" Campbell, appropriately) and Fossey must be castrated. "In the Oedipal complex heterosexuality both depends on and reinforces the loss of a daughter's attachment to her mother: that attachment is most likely to be rediscovered through an erotically experienced bond with another woman, or through the daughter herself becoming another mother."³⁰ It's not difficult to see Fossey's relation to Carr as symbolically erotic in its "Africa" ambience. Yet Carr does yield her own maternal authority ("Oh, I wish you'd leave Africa for good, before it kills you," her offscreen voice warns Fossey in retrospect.) She silently succumbs to the required rupture of bonds between women, to the paternal claim — but whose?

Fossey is parthenogenetic mother to another ape besides Pucker: Digit. But this ape is also symbolically her mate. Fossey is procreator of all the apes in Rwanda: she not only protects, saves, and revives them but bestows meaning upon them as they enter "language" with her. However, of particular significance is her creation of Digit, which is composed within the film's frame as a visual reference to Michelangelo's fresco of God creating Adam on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. In this scene in *Gorillas* Fossey, on the right of the screen, poignantly reaches her right hand, palm up, across to Digit's on the left. After a montage of over a dozen extreme close-up shots on their faces and their hands — reaching, clasping, retreating, re-clasping and separating (Campbell's camera clicking away momentarily) — Fossey finally repeats the movement with her own hand, into which the ape has left a "friendly deposit," as Digit beats his breast in amplified masculine braggadocio. More than the creation of Man has transpired.

For the full seductive appeal of this scene, it's important on at least this occasion to turn to Fossey's account in her own narrative:

I felt I might have crossed an intangible barrier between human and ape . . . when he suddenly stopped and turned to stare directly at me. The expression in his eyes was unfathomable. Spellbound, I returned his gaze — a gaze that seemed to combine elements of inquiry and of acceptance . . . [he] became the first gorilla ever to touch me . . . I had just settled down on a comfortable moss-cushioned Hagenia tree trunk when . . . wearing his 'I

want to be entertained' expression . . . [he] peered at me through a lattice-work of vegetation as he began his strutting, swaggering approach. Suddenly he was at my side and sat down . . . Since he appeared totally relaxed I lay in the foliage, slowly extending my hand, palm upward . . . After looking intently at my hand . . . [he] stood up and extended his hand to touch his fingers against my own . . . Thrilled at his own daring, he gave vent to his excitement by a quick chestbeat . . . Since that day the spot has been called *Fasi Ya Mkoni*, 'the Place of the Hands.'³¹

A few differences are instructive here. In the book, "he" is Peanuts, youngest male of Group 8 and otherwise relatively insignificant to Fossey; but the film makes him Digit, a silver-back entering his virile age as a sentry and breeder in Group 4. Fossey *does* speak of Digit in her book — in fact, with much eroticism: "I felt an arm around my shoulders. I looked up into Digit's warm, gentle brown eyes. He stood pensively gazing down at me before patting my head and plopping down by my side. I lay my head on Digit's lap, a position that provided welcome warmth."³²

Digit's death shattered her. "From that moment on I came to live within an insulated part of myself."³³ Interestingly, her first fear was that "the world would climb evangelistically onto a 'save the gorilla' bandwagon," seeing Digit as a sacrificial victim.³⁴ As it is the film structures him as an African Christ figure in his slaughter, propped up against a hagenia tree (cross) with head missing (instead of hanging), and hands dismembered (rather than nailed). And *Gorillas* made no small contribution to his legendary martyrdom as celebrated today by the "Digit Fund." But Fossey's own narrative stresses this notion even further: "Digit was not killed as an intended victim of slaughter by trophy hunters; he gave his life to save his family — which, tragically, had been in the wrong place at the wrong time."³⁵ "And fallen from grace in Original Sin," Fossey might as well add, because in the film she approaches him to cradle his wounds like Mary in the *Pieta*, and I, for one, find this disconcertingly revealing.

The film, by virtue of a transubstantiation of Digit from ape flesh to transcendent African to God-like saviour, mystifies Fossey's relation with him as "Immaculate Miscegenation." In the film's exposé Leakey refers to the Mountain Gorilla as the "fairest of them all"; Rwanda's local diplomat refers to Fossey as "the American woman who lives with the gorillas"; in Fossey's burial Sembagare re-draws the "lines of sight" (the stone markers) around Digit's grave to extend them to embrace and include Fossey's in an act of Sumu worship representing "two souls united forever." In the scene in which Fossey and Campbell first consummate their affection, the innuendoes of the dialogue disclose more of the same:

CAMPBELL: I was amazed when he came so close to you.

FOSSEY: Digit and I have a strange connection. He's alone, and I understand that.

CAMPBELL: Why is that?

FOSSEY: (*Runs her painted toenails over Campbell's underwear shirt.*) It's nice to see a married man who can sew."

Thus the "gorilla girl" reveals that she prefers an eligible ape to a married man.

Before we leave this discussion of the Oedipal myth and turn to the mystical nature of Fossey's miscegenation, I'd like to direct attention to three fetishes in the film which represent not African but Western secular investment of sexual power.

We have already observed the erotic value of the hand: it is Digit's (as other apes', figured earlier) hands that are sold as trophies — the very same hand that received Fossey into the transcendent anthropoid race, by grasping *her* hand, which at the scene of her death drips its blood upon the 8"x 10" glossy portrait of Digit on the floor beside her bed. The photograph in general has become a ubiquitous fetish in the film, entering the frame at every opportunity to establish Fossey's relation with a "rightful" male mate — her fiancé, on her vanity and her outdoor typewriter stand; Campbell, on her bedroom dresser; Digit, held at arm's length before her female gaze, as she lies in bed listening to the female jazz radio voice singing "That Sugar Baby of Mine," falling upon her breast in arms' embrace as she dozes off fantasizing him. The only still photograph of two in the film is that of Dian and Digit, marking their common grave.

There is another fetish: the lap, both human and animal, if they can be so distinguished. It is only in the book that it is particularly Digit's lap into which Dian's head falls; in the film this lap is Sembagare's. Dian's and Sembagare's *only* physical contact throughout the text of the film (outside of the "humorous" moment when he gives her *derrière* a "boost") is the occasion of Digit's death. As Dian has gone "jungle mad," Sembagare grabs both her arms, first as a matter of control, but then as a comforting embrace. She cries, she falls to her knees, she sobs in his lap. The cut is to the mountain "mist."

In this maternal melodrama Fossey's murder, like Digit's, ultimately damns her (punishes her for her transgressions against the patriarchal family) and redeems her (glorifies her as a martyr for world ecology). Her authority of vision is taken away. She has not kept maternity (power) and sexuality (desire) separate in her relations with the apes. She has been a parthenogenetic mother, endowed with sight, who motivated the camera, and rejected the "right" man; these are symbolic reasons to have her slain. But there is a more obvious reason as well.

. . . we live in a civilization where the *consecrated* (religious or secular) representation of femininity is absorbed by motherhood . . . this motherhood is the *fantasy* that is nurtured by the adult, man or woman, of a lost territory; what is more, it involves less an idealized archaic mother than the idealization of the relationship that binds us to her, one that cannot be localized — an idealization of primary narcissism.

Julia Kristeva
"Stabat Mater"
Tales of Love

Fossey's miscegenation is with apes, not Africans. Once Campbell leaves and Digit is killed, Fossey is left only with Sembagare, who *had* a family, "but no more" — they, too, were killed. There is a very real potential here for covalent bonding between Fossey and someone who is *not* the "right" man but is her closest (perhaps only) companion, confidant, and supporter. The underlying fear in the film, residing in both the African myth of the Dark Continent and the Oedipus myth of the patriarchal family, is not that cross-species desire is castrating, but that miscegenation is castrating.

The postscript of the film ends with a line that aggravated virtually every American film critic as much as Fossey's hackneyed affair with Campbell in the film: "Her death remains a mystery." Fossey's death is no more mysterious than the myth of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, Mary Incarnate. Mary was at once the mother of her son, his daughter, and his wife — the female metamorphosed into the tightest knot of parenthood, Kristeva tells us.³⁶ Fossey in

Gorillas is Digit's symbolic mother (she creates him), his daughter (she descends from him), and his lover (if not his actual wife). As in the myth of Mary (and Jesus), Fossey (and Digit) are free from sin so as to be symbolically freed from death as well, by their Dormition/Resurrection as idols of worship. Fossey, like Mary, had to be proclaimed Queen of Heaven (Mt. Visoke) and, also, declared Mother of a divine institution on earth (imperialism). Fossey, like Mary, offers the prototype of the love relation, romantic love and child love (both directed toward the apes), encompassing the entire range from sublimation to asceticism to masochism. And the Word was made Flesh, and dwelt among us . . .

impregnation without sexuality; according to this notion a woman, preserved from masculine intervention, conceives alone with a 'third party,' a non-person, the Spirit. In the rare instances when the mother of Jesus appears in the Gospels, she is informed that filial relationship rests not with the flesh but with the name or, in other words, that any possible matrilinearism is to be repudiated and the symbolic link alone to last.¹⁷

Fossey's gender relation with Digit is one of pseudo-"women's liberation." She is freed from the masculine intervention of the patriarchal family because her relation is one of *language*. Thus she is also "freed" from any claim upon the "territory" of empire. Her threat of power as real woman-worker, real scientist-colonizer, is subdued by the "immaculateness" of her symbolic miscegenation with an African (ape). Her potential power as embodiment of a gender-race alignment, a threat to the extent that the apes are emblems of Africa, is negotiated by Fossey's/Mary's/white woman's 1) complete subjection (sacrificing all for the apes); 2) paranoid lust for power (as the African Queen); 3) exclusion from time through the representation of Dormition and

Assumption (the "Black Magic" unity of souls); 4) the imaging of A woman as Unique, an aloneness attained through exacerbated masochism (both Fossey's martyrdom and her devotion to "the highest sublimation alien to her body").¹⁸

As Kristeva defines it, Motherhood today is our unconscious claim of the lost space of the mother's womb — a glorification of it and of our right to it. Are the language and the meaning of her words so far from those of the myths of both Oedipus and Africa? "A claim for lost territory" — the *colony*; the fantasy of a "relationship that binds us to it" — as *master to slave*; a space that cannot be "localized" — because it occupies the mythic power of *language*.

The configuration of power emerging in gender-race-language has loomed large over Africa long since its genesis as castration anxiety in the acquisition and domination of the Dark Continent. Karen Tranberg Hansen reminds us that colonial nostalgia is pervasive on our screens today, while at the same time

Third World countries have replaced most of the former Empire, indigenous persons and new expatriots (employed on contract) have moved into the bungalows of yester-year's sahibs and memsahibs. Gender, race and class relations are being newly negotiated daily (by men and women from diverse backgrounds). Their experiences and relations at work and during leisure (with less well-situated local men and women) constitute an unfolding history of a global culture in the making whose gender dimensions demand to be studied.¹⁹

This author recommends at least four recent films that lend themselves to such a study: *King Kong*; *Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes*; *Out of Africa*; and *White Mischief*. There are others, outside the Empire of Hollywood, but Hollywood is as good a place as any from which to start.



One of the love stories in *Gorillas in the Mist*

Notes

1. Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1989, p. 89.
2. Karen Tranberg Hansen, *Signs*, Summer, 1989.
3. This information I have derived from some 25 clips from newspapers, magazines, and journals at the American Film Institute in Los Angeles, as well as word of mouth from anthropologists I know.
4. Off-hand, such films as *The Turning Point*, *Reds*, *Norma Rae*, *Silkwood*, and *Coal Miner's Daughter*, by Apted himself, come to mind. There are many others. See Elayne Rapping, "Liberation in Chains: The 'Woman Question' in Hollywood," *Cineaste*, Vol. XVII, No. 1, 1989.
5. Mary Louise Pratt, "Scratches on the Face of the Country; or What Mr. Barrow Saw in the Land of the Bushmen," in Henry Louis Gates, Ed., *Race, Writing, and Difference*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1986, p. 151.
6. Edward W. Said, "Secular Criticism," in *The World, the Text and the Critic*, Cambridge, Mass., 1983, p. 9.
7. Patrick Brantlinger, "Victorians and Africans: The Genealogy of the Myth of the Dark Continent," in Gates.
8. James Grahame, "Africa Delivered; or The Slave Trade Abolished," in James Montgomery, James Grahame, and E. Benger, *Poems on the Abolition of the Slave Trade*, 1809 (in Brantlinger).
9. Brantlinger, p. 194.
10. Tim Jeal, *Livingstone*, New York, 1973, p. 146 (in Brantlinger).
11. Minh-ha, p. 89.
12. May Crawford, *By the Equator's Snowy Peak: A Record of Medical Missionary Work and Travel in British East Africa*, London, 1913, p. 56 (in Brantlinger).
13. Anthony Hope Hawkins, (Anthony Hope), *The God in the Car*, New York, 1895, p. 19 (in Brantlinger).
14. Samuel White Baker, *The Albert N'yanza, Great Basin of the Nile, and Exploration of the Nile Sources*, London, 1866, 1: 211 (in Brantlinger).
15. Hugh Stowell Scott (Henry S. Merryman), *With Edged Tools*, London, 1894, p. 321-2 (in Brantlinger).
16. See Dian Fossey, *Gorillas in the Mist*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1983 for, among other significant perspectives, her gratitude to and admiration of Sanwekwe for his incredible skill as a tracker and for his close friendship, and for details of how she saw the poachers making use of the gorillas for virility rituals.
17. Pratt, p. 144.
18. Pratt, p. 145.
19. Pratt, p. 19.
20. Brantlinger, p. 203.
21. Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1800-1960*, Hamden, Conn., 1982, p. 45-6 (in Brantlinger).
22. Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selections in Relation Sex*, New York, 1874, p. 613 (in Brantlinger).
23. Wole Soyinka, *Myth, Literature, and the African World*, Cambridge, 1976, p. x (in Christopher Miller, "Theories of Africans: The Question of Literary Anthropology," in Gates).
24. Brantlinger, p. 217.
25. See Fossey, for her own account's revelation that she did, indeed, have some knowledge of the history of the Batwa and the Rwandan farmers, though perhaps no political sensitivity to it.
26. (Dominique) O. Mannoni, *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*, trans. Pamela Powesland, London, 1956, pp. 19, 21.
27. Naomi Scheman, "Missing Mothers/Desiring Daughters: Framing the Sight of Women," *Critical Inquiry*, Autumn, 1988, Vol. 15, No. 1, p. 65.
28. Ibid., p. 72-3.
29. Ibid., p. 75.
30. Ibid., p. 73.
31. Fossey, p. 141-2.
32. Ibid., p. 199.
33. Ibid., p. 206.
34. Ibid., p. 207.
35. Fossey, p. 208-9.
36. Julia Kristeva, "Stabat Mater," *Tales of Love*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1987, p. 243.
37. Ibid., p. 237.
38. Ibid., p. 237-8.
39. Karen Tranberg Hansen.

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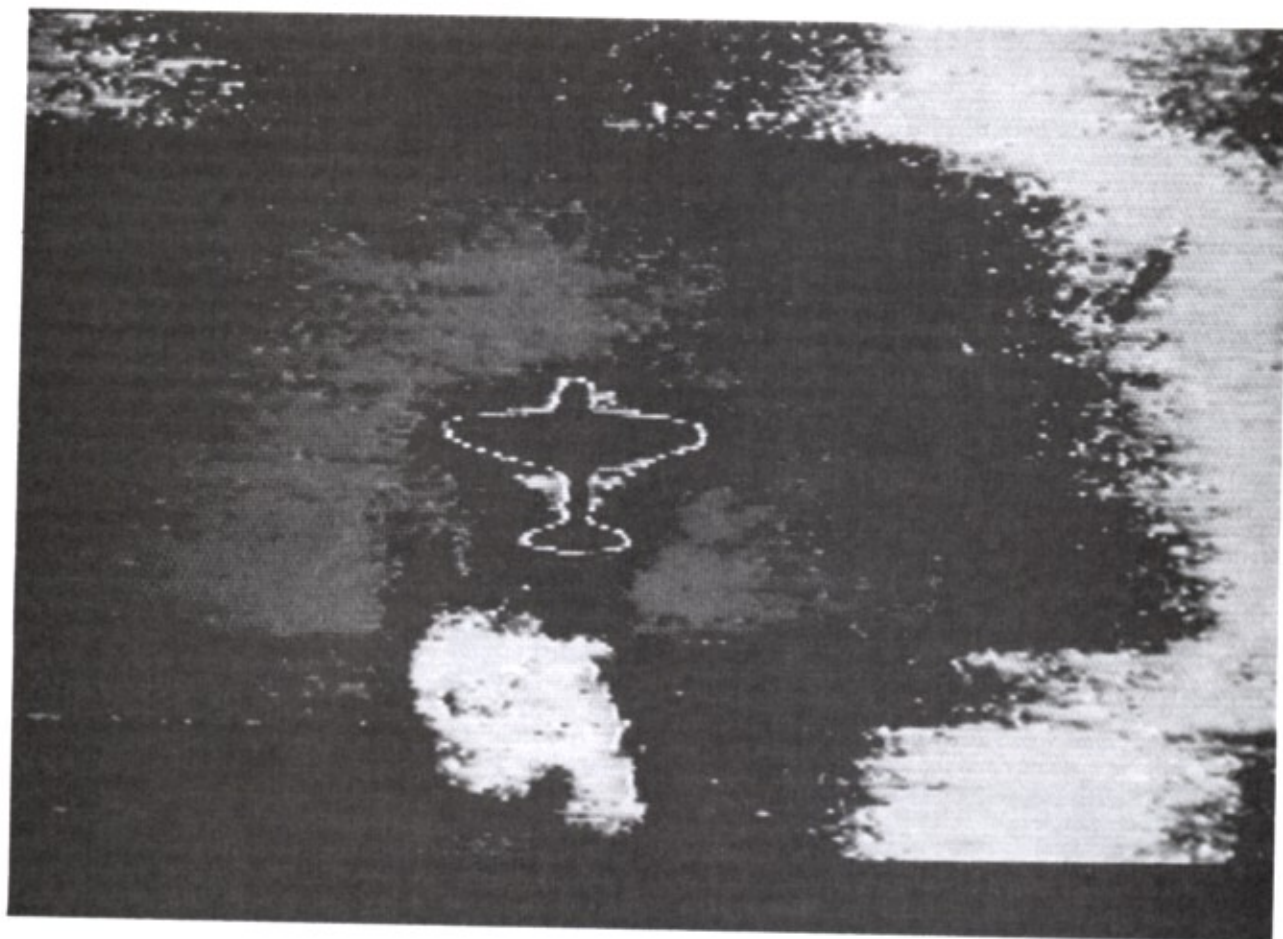
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AROUND THE WORLD, ACROSS ALL FRONTIERS:

Sans Soleil as Dépays

by Michael Walsh

Introduction

In this essay, I will offer a textual analysis of Chris Marker's 1982 film *Sans Soleil*, devoting my attention largely (though not exclusively) to the film's patterns of editing, and looking in particular at its graphic matches. In doing this, I hope to provide a more informed basis for understanding the way in which the film presents its viewer with a political and historical question, that of the relationship between the developed and the underdeveloped worlds, which it poses perhaps most dramatically when it passes across a cut from Japan to Guinea-Bissau, from the Cape Verde Islands to San Francisco. My first order

of business will be to explore the rhetoric of *Sans Soleil* as a whole; I will conclude by considering the particular textures of the film's montages of underdevelopment and hyperdevelopment. I take this tack both because it seems a productive way to engage with the film and because I want my essay to stand as a counterexample to the work of those critics and theorists who believe that politics and history are (or should be) situated outside the text. This is to say that I hope my essay will stand as a counterexample both to certain critics who imagine themselves as above politics and to certain critics who imagine themselves as political standard-bearers.

However routinely the idea that textuality constitutes a parallel universe separate from politics and history has been discredited, it reasserts itself with a virtually gravitational inertia which suggests its importance to ideology proceed as if quite traditional ideas of history and politics are capable of exhausting the resources of textuality. Thus, for example, while recent contests concerning the political values of deconstruction do include some voices aware both of the politics of textuality and the textuality of politics, there is no shortage of those who seem to have a vested interest in insisting on a separation between the two, usually in order that one or the other may be judged to take precedence.¹ If there is some basis for thinking that the struggle between theories which give pride of place to textuality and theories which give pride of place to history and/or politics is a determinate historical phenomenon in itself, then there seems less and less purpose in another rehearsal of the general issue involved. Thus my interest in examining specific images and specific sounds from a specific film.

I do not suggest that to pursue political and textual questions simultaneously is an original strategy, since of course it is not; what I do propose is that it is continuously necessary to contest the separation between politics and the text, continuously necessary to establish the extent to which what we know (and what we don't know) about capitalism, racism, and patriarchy is bound up with what we know (and what we don't know) about film and video. I say "and what we don't know" in order to make clear the extent to which my textual analysis will pursue a political question, a political openness, even perhaps a political aporia. The global compass and sensitivity to the people found in *Sans Soleil* make it a film capable of engaging with the issues of uneven development

and unequal exchange in both the most philosophical and the most frankly personal of fashions, yet that is not to say that we are provided with any very definite resolutions concerning these characteristic power distributions of late imperialism. Finally, I will suggest that the significance of *Sans Soleil* lies precisely in its openness, both in the formal sense that the film's subject-matter becomes indistinguishable from its style, and in the dialogical sense that those who see the film may gain a new kind of access both to those issues it raises and those it elides. I mention the latter since I do not want openness to function as a mere convenience, a political catchall.

Dis-Orientation

Sans Soleil is surely among the most physically beautiful, the most inventively edited, and the most textually sophisticated of recent European films in 35 mm. It bears serious comparisons with Vertov, Eisenstein, Kuleshov, and Medvedkin (all of whom have left their distinctive imprints on it) and its appearance in North America has rekindled quite widespread interest in Marker's work.² Whatever the value of recent films by other veterans of the French new wave, Marker is arguably the only filmmaker of that generation whose work of the 1980s represents a genuinely decisive advance over his earlier record. Perhaps this should be amended to read "what we know of his earlier record," since a number of important films by Marker remain unseen in North America, including *Si J'Avais Quatre Dromadaires* (1966) and *Le Fond De L'Air Est Rouge* (1977), the SLON group's collective study of 1968 and its aftermath. That period still weighs heavily on the memory of *Sans Soleil*, as well as on its meditations concerning memory; to represent the film's vacillations between political demoralisation and resurgent optimism, we might paraphrase its locution concerning its favored female poet of the Japanese Heian period, Sei Shonagon, and speak of its "discreet political melancholy". At the same time, it is important to underscore that *Sans Soleil* is decisively different from works by certain of Marker's contemporaries in which political disappointment has given rise to the simple elimination of political consciousness from the text.

As is clear to anyone who has seen *Sans Soleil*, it is about Japan, about Guinea-Bissau, about a number of other places in both the First and the Third Worlds, and about cinema —

about seeing, hearing, showing, knowing, speaking, and writing. However, a simple majority of images in the film represent Japan, and before I embark on an analysis of the film's patterns of editing, I want to come to an initial understanding of its global compass and temporal ambitiousness by considering it in the context of a certain Western fascination with Japan, that fascination with an otherness which is also a sameness, insofar as Japan is the location of the only fully-developed capitalist economy which is not Western. Even while students of Japanese cinema have focussed ever more reflexive attention on the complexities of cross-cultural perception (see Lehman, Kirihaara, and Nygren), I believe that this question of the singularity of Japan as the one non-Western country which participates fully in the political economy of the First World has gone relatively unexamined. If *Sans Soleil* gives its viewer cause to ponder the relationship between the First and Third Worlds, its first move is a dis-Orientation, a poetic meditation on the one region of the First World which Western viewers see as Other. Such a gesture is certainly politically risky, threatening to submerge our understanding of imperialist power in a play of more purely cultural differences; however, I will suggest that the tactic proves finally politically salutary.

The thinkers from whom I have learned to appreciate such singularities include Perry Anderson, who along with Tom Nairn has been at work for more than twenty years on the consequences for Britain of having been the first and for some time the only industrialised capitalist nation. Also influential has been Noel Burch, who offers an earlier singularity in Japanese history as the first and most basic explanation of the difference he perceives between Western and Japanese films:

... In two thousand years of recorded history, no part of Japanese territory had ever been occupied until the 1945 defeat. Japan was never subjected to the semi-colonial status which was China's for over a century, or to complete enslavement as were Egypt and India. She is the *only* major non-Western country to have escaped the colonial yoke. Her cinema, of course, is but a minor consequence of this crucial fact, which in turn is one of a series of historical features by which Japan may be identified as belonging simultaneously to several apparently incompatible types and stages of historical development. (27)

To put the same basic recognition in the context of the debate on "the development of underdevelopment," consider Andre Gunder Frank's account of Japan's escape from underdevelopment:

Internationally, of course the classic case of industrialization through nonparticipation as a satellite in the capitalist world system is obviously that of Japan after the Meiji restoration. Why, one may ask, was resource-poor but unsatellized Japan able to do so . . . ? . . . the fundamental reason is that Japan was not satellized during either the Tokugawa or the Meiji period and therefore did not have its development structurally limited as did the countries which were so satellized. (11)

My purpose in supplying these citations is to suggest that a certain Western perception of Japan is bound up with a formative, grudging, half-conscious, half-phobic understanding of the uneven development of the global economic system. Japan has long been seen in the West as a social formation within which the shapes of modernity have been uneasily superimposed on a feudal underpinning, although that perception has been increasingly superseded by another equally uneasy notion, that of Japanese hyperdevelopment outstripping the Western economies in sectors such as electronics, automobiles, shipbuilding, and steel. What both ideas have in common, however, is an implicit sense that global development should proceed with regularity, along with an implicit recognition that in practice such development is uneven. It is important to understand that a recognition of development as uneven is not necessarily a recognition of development as unequal; yet since the latter is scarcely imaginable in the absence of the former, we are probably safe in assuming that consciousness of the former represents a measure of ideological progress.

The uncertainty in question is shared to some extent even by Burch, with his formulation that "Japan may be identified as belonging simultaneously to several apparently incompatible types and stages of historical development". Such perceptions remain available for the abusive projections of Orientalism even when they originate within radical traditions in the West: consider Burch once more, grappling with the scandal of Japan as an Asian nation in which the Asiatic mode of production as defined by Marx was never more than "sub-marginal" or vestigial.(30) Thus it is

sometimes true that what is considered anomalous in Japanese development is actually more instructive about European capacities for repressing or glossing over the contradictions in the history of the West. Yet the question of even and uneven development seems nonetheless potentially very helpful in

rather than Montepilloy and San Francisco; what is impressive in the treatment of the latter locations actually derives in part from their infrequency in the film.

At one or two moments, the voiceover in *Sans Soleil* comments directly on the film's many passages from the



the study of a film which lavishes such attention on Japan, and meditates at such length on the Third World, while restricting its representations of the West to a sequence here and a shot there. Certain of those sequences and shots are admittedly very striking, as for example when we follow Hayao Yameneko on his tour of the locations of *Vertigo*, or when the exoticism and otherness of any putative home base is elaborated via the ideograms and emus of the Ile-de-France. Yet it remains clear that the bulk of the film's energy is expended on Tokyo and Guinea-Bissau

hyperdevelopment of Tokyo to the sub-Saharan deserts, and denies that such passages seek to develop contrasts. Instead, the film proposes to focus on what may link the difference of the Sahel from the West with the difference of Japan from the West:

He used to write to me; the Sahel is not only what is shown of it when it is too late. It's a land that drought seeps into like water into a leaking boat. The animals resurrected for the time of a carnival in Bissau will be petrified again as soon as a new attack has changed

the savannah into a desert. This is a state of survival that the rich countries have forgotten, with one exception — you win — Japan. My constant comings and goings are not a search for contrasts. They are a journey to the two extreme poles of survival.

This commentary is accompanied by a graphic match which links the horns of an animal killed by Sahelian drought to the papier-mache horns of participants in a carnival in Bissau; after a transcontinental passage by way of footage from the Apollo 11 mission, the carnival in Bissau is in its turn matched with a street festival in a Tokyo neighbourhood. In the hope of providing a more textually-informed basis for the understanding of this reflex by which the film links the first and third world, I want at this point to proceed to my analysis of the rhetoric of *Sans Soleil* as a whole.

Textual Analysis

Sans Soleil begins with black leader, with darkness, with the condition of cinema. Its first image is a casually beautiful shot of three blonde children on a road in Iceland, which a female voiceover ascribes to the camera of someone else, her correspondent, and identifies as his "image of happiness." This establishes the basic fiction of the film, whereby the filmmaker whose images we see is both everywhere on the globe and yet nowhere to be found, as well as inaugurating its intertextuality: Marker's 1962 short *La Jetée* begins with an image of childhood, while his 1971 short, *Le Train En Marche* (And The Train Rolls On), was designed to precede screenings of Medvedkin's *Happiness*. The voiceover goes on to describe the filmmaker's difficulty in linking the image of happiness to any other shot, thereby posing the question of montage which will reverberate throughout this most heavily edited of films. When a second shot does nonetheless appear, acquired footage of a US warplane sinking dramatically into the bowels of an aircraft carrier, the image of happiness has found its antithesis, the film's political dialectic is underway, and its intertextuality has been underscored: *La Jetée* too begins by combining shots of children with shots of airplanes.

This second shot goes unremarked by the voiceover, even seeming to contradict what the voice says about the filmmaker wanting to put the image of happiness "all alone at the beginning of a film." This establishes another distance, another difference, this time

between image and speech, although the speech in this case is actually writing; the voice reads letters from a fictional filmmaker named Sandor Krasna, in a fashion reminiscent of (although also distinct from) the soundtrack of another contemporary city symphony, Chantal Akerman's *News From Home*. This difference also intimates the distance which will open up within the soundtrack itself, between the measured poetic cadences of the voice and the busy swirlings of electronic sound which will soon surface on the soundtrack and last throughout.

As perhaps begins to be evident, *Sans Soleil* in its entirety can be said to exfoliate from this initial pairing of shots, and I intend to linger on the sense in which this first doublet of images, separated by black leader from the trilingual main titles, and by those titles from the rest of the text, inaugurates the rhetoric of the whole film. The proleptic value of the first two shots is perhaps most literally evident in the sense that we later see a closely comparable montage. As we have noted, the film makes many intercontinental journeys across cuts, passing from a shoreline in California to a shoreline in Iceland, from images of the revolutionary war in Guinea-Bissau to images of anti-colonial demonstrations in Portugal, from the death of a panda in a Tokyo zoo to the death of a giraffe on an African savannah, from a child in Japan to a child in Africa; on the last occasion, however, the journey is made by Polaris missile, thus bringing an image of childhood once again into contiguity with an image of weaponry.

More broadly, the first two shots also introduce the film's motive tension between the spontaneity of *vérité* images and the carefully calculated interventions of editing patterns, which proceed now by theme, now by association, now by disposition in the frame, now by camera angle, now by screen direction. Such matches leap audaciously across cuts from Japan to Iceland to Holland, from original to borrowed to found footage, from film to television to video. Thus a lighthouse on the Cape Verde Island of Sal is graphically linked with the ruined tower of Montepilloy in France, and both are compared with the long January shadow of a bonze in a Tokyo plaza. Alternatively, an African heron is linked with an emu in the Ile-de-France; the camera closes in on the emu's eye and then cuts successively to the gaze of an African woman and to the eye of the Japanese figure of the cat which salutes. (The film's fascination with the eye is openly thematized by the

voiceover, recurring in everything from the redeployment of the credit sequence of *Vertigo* to the documentation of a Japanese ritual in which a victorious politician paints out the eye of a totemic figure). Elsewhere, the statue of a camel in Africa is followed by the statue of a policeman on Japan's Shiba coast, which in its turn is displaced by a closeup on the white gloves Japanese bus-drivers have in common with Japanese policemen; through the windows of the bus, we see a series of shots (a scarecrow, a pile of junked cars, an airplane parked in a carnival) which resume the idea of stillness in the place of motion with which the statues began the sequence. Elsewhere yet, the video-synthesized image of a kamikaze plane is displaced by the filmed image of the wing of a contemporary jet high over Africa, and a shot of dogs frolicking at the waterline of a sandy beach is followed by an overhead in which desert dunes look like waves. In its turn, this last shot is followed by an overhead in which an African woman gazes from the deck of a ship out over the passing waves; this image proves to be one of a number of faces which are freeze-framed, and thus opens onto two of the film's ongoing meditations, that on the look of the filmed subject, especially the woman, and that on stillness and motion as the basic constituents of cinema. This last is a particular obsession in a film fascinated both by statues and by every kind of animation which the television sets, video games, comic books, billboards, and advertising emblems of Tokyo can provide — we watch the inflation and deflation of a plastic saxophone, follow the gestures of a robot representing John Kennedy, ride into outer space on an animated train, and listen to a discussion of Pac-Man as a social metaphor.

If the question of montage is thus posed in terms of graphic match and mismatch, it may also be considered in terms of more elaborate strategies. Consider for example the Eisensteinian montages of *Sans Soleil*, both textbook instances and genuinely surprising reanimations of the Russian's technique; thus the passage from the department store mechanical figure of John Kennedy by way of footage of Mr. Akao of the Japanese Patriotic Party to images of the struggle against the airport at Narita. Thus also the dialectical structure which takes us from a sequence examining late-night TV pornography via the outstretched arms of Pope John Paul II to the establishment in Hokkaido which provides an unex-

pected synthesis of the previous contradiction by combining the functions of sex shop, chapel, and museum.

If the first two shots do seem so generative, so emblematic of what is to come, we should not forget the frames of black leader which precede, separate,

back towards the southern islands and Tokyo. In beginning *Sans Soleil* proper by following a group of citizens from pre-dawn sleep to wakefulness, Marker echoes the strategy of Vertov in *Man With A Movie Camera*, a film whose initial figures of waking I have discussed



and follow them. For, as we have noted, black leader is not nothing; it is the darkness which is one condition of cinema and which, according to the Roland Barthes of "En Sortant du Cinéma," resumes that metonymy of darkneses which includes the street outside and the interior of the theatre. The black frames thus represent the first hint of that metacinematic sensibility which informs and organizes Marker's entire vision of Tokyo. That vision first begins to enlarge when it transpires that the shots which follow the main titles are a long series of images of passengers sleeping on a ferryboat heading from Hokkaido

elsewhere in terms of modulation in the subjectivity of the spectator who has just begun to sink into his seat, to surrender his mobility and a quality of his alertness (Walsh 1983). When *Sans Soleil's* voiceover speaks of "waiting, immobility, snatches of sleep", it could be speaking of the cinema spectator as easily as the Hokkaido ferryboat passenger, and adds the further metacinematic twist by which the sleep it depicts is caused by motion, the motion of transportation (see Doane and Kirby).

All this underscores what we have already noted as Marker's ability to insert the most apparently occasional

footage into editing patterns of density and profundity; in the case of the Hokkaido ferry, the voiceover even goes out of its way to reinforce the impression of insignificance, saying "I've been around the world a dozen times and now only banality interests me. On this trip I've pursued it with the relentlessness of a bounty-hunter." When the ferry sequence ends with the dawn arrival of the bullet train in Tokyo, it also points us forward to a later sequence, already established as a tour-de-force of editing in a film so full of bravuras. This is the dream sequence in the Tokyo subway, owing perhaps more to Kuleshov than to Vertov, and developing *vérité* footage which catches its subjects not only unawares but actually unconscious into a poetic meditation on both motion as the basis of cinema and the perennial metaphorical equation of film and dream. Beginning with a hundred Tokyo hands buying tickets for the subway, passing through a reverie in which sleeping subway passengers are provided with images from the previous night's TV as their dreams, and concluding with a figure of waking under a Japanese billboard for Scorsese's *Raging Bull*, the subway sequence is another remarkably evocative treatment of sleeping, dreaming, and waking as they relate to the experience of the cinema spectator.

However, if we examine the sequence in search of aspects which will lead discussion toward what remains unexamined, we might consider some hints regarding the intertext and especially the image of the upraised hand so ubiquitous in the film. In a sense, these are one and the same. If *Sans Soleil* makes reference to *Brigadoon* and *Apocalypse Now* as well as *Raging Bull*, it is nonetheless clear that the really important Hollywood film is *Vertigo*, which is rivalled in intertextual significance only by Marker's own earlier films, particularly *La Jetée*. Now what links *La Jetée* and *Vertigo* is precisely this image of the outstretched hand and pointing finger, and the unlikely claims about time and mortality which are associated with it in the respective fictions; in *Vertigo*, Madeleine tells Scottie that she was born and died within a period of the past denoted by the rings of a sequoia tree, while the hero of *La Jetée* points outside a similar tree to indicate that he comes from the future. In the latter film, however, the image of the outstretched arm and pointing finger is graphically linked with many other images, participating both in a long series of dramatic chiaroscuros and diagonals and in a modu-

lation of meanings which include eyes, masks, faces, birds, wings, and stuffed animals.

With the exception of a single figure of waking, *La Jetée* is made up entirely of stills; its climactic sequences, in a museum of natural history among the frozen postures of stuffed animals and birds underscores a metacinematic aesthetic which looks backward to Marey and Muybridge and forward to *Sans Soleil*. I say this because the latter film is also full of outstretched arms, pointing fingers, frozen postures, animals, and birds. The gesture originally borrowed from *Vertigo* is ubiquitous in *Sans Soleil*; among many other instances, it is rediscovered in those boarding the subway for the dream-sequence, in the acquired footage of Amílcar Cabral waving goodbye to the shore, in the images of members of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and the Cape Verde Islands (PAIGC) exchanging greetings, in the poster of John Paul II which accompanies an exhibition of Vatican treasures, in the kimono'd street dancers of Tokyo, and

in the small votive figure of the cat which salutes, an image to which Marker returns again and again.

Sans Soleil's voiceover describes Tokyo as a city full of "mediating animals", and the cat which salutes becomes a relay, linked with the film's equally numerous images of statues and animals. The most cursory reflection on the film will recall the Ginza owl, the statue of the faithful dog Hachiko, and the long series of animal tableaux in the sex shop/chapel, as well as various images of dolls, mechanical human figures, model bears with revolving heads, and colonial monuments (with upraised arms) knocked over by the PAIGC. If we recall that early in his career Marker assisted Resnais on *Les Statues Meurent Aussi* (1950-53), we should begin to understand that the effort of *Sans Soleil* to link animality, animation and animism is no idle play on words.

Conclusion

The reference to animism brings us face to face with the second of the moments at which the film's voice-

over speaks directly of the relationship between Japan and Africa. While the image track cuts from a Japanese festival in which flower petals are dropped on the heads of participants of an African ritual involving an identical gesture, the voiceover muses on Lévi-Strauss' idea of the "poignancy of things" and the possible relevance in Japan of African animisms. Now *Sans Soleil* does not invariably make the 9000-mile journey from Japan to West Africa by way of the graphic match; consider, for example, the flashcutting which inserts the doubledecker buses of Tokyo into the Cape Verdean desert, and the sound bridge which explains the agitation of wild dogs on a Cape Verdean beach by playing Radio Hongkong's shortwave announcement of the beginning of the Chinese year of the water-dog. Yet the graphic match is clearly the rhetorical mainstay of the image-track, and certainly the figure which most routinely effects the passage from the First to the Third World. Indeed, relationships between shots are crafted with sufficient care and resourcefulness that at



A moment in Marker's *La Jetée*

moments we might speak more accurately of the conceptual match; thus the film shows us footage from a doll-burning ritual in Japan in which we are surprised to see a white woman (presumably a tourist) glancing at the camera, then passes to a shot from Africa in which a black child glances at the camera while we are surprised by the presence next to her of a blonde-haired white-skinned doll. A few minutes earlier, in the comparison of street festivals in Bissau and Tokyo, we have been similarly thrown back onto our Eurocentrism by the surprise we experience at the image of an African reveller wearing whiteface; the film works regularly to create such disorientations, as for example when the voiceover remarks that the most incomprehensible of all images on Japanese television are those of Lech Walesa and Gérard de Nerval, i.e. those of Europe.

If at this point we have completed at least a rough survey of the film's remarkably inventive patterns of editing, the recurrence within these patterns of such dizzying transits from Asia to Africa returns us to our motive question, that of development, underdevelopment, and "the development of underdevelopment." This last phrase, the title of a landmark essay by Andre Gunder Frank, is meant to suggest that underdevelopment is not a neutral term, merely descriptive of a mere happenstance, but that it is the name of a condition actively and systematically visited on the poor countries by the dynamics of metropolitan capitalism:

It is generally held that economic development occurs in a succession of capitalist stages and that today's underdeveloped countries are still in a stage, sometimes depicted as an original stage of history, through which the now-developed countries passed long ago. Yet even a modest acquaintance with history shows that underdevelopment is not original or traditional and that neither the past nor the present of the underdeveloped countries resemble in any important respect the past of the now-developed countries. The now-developed countries were never underdeveloped, though they may have been undeveloped.

... historical research demonstrates that contemporary underdevelopment is in large part the historical product of past and continuing economic and other relations between the satellite underdeveloped and metropolitan now-developed countries. Furthermore, these relations are an

essential part of the structure and development of the capitalist system on a world scale as a whole. A related and also largely erroneous view is that the development of these underdeveloped countries ... will be generated and stimulated ... by diffusing capital, institutions, values, etc., to them from the international and national capitalist metropolises. Historical perspective based on the underdeveloped countries' past experience suggests that, on the contrary, ... economic development can only occur independently of most of these relation of diffusion. (Rhodes 5)

In other words, there is no guarantee that the intrinsic benevolence of the world economic system will stimulate the development of underdeveloped countries, and much evidence to the contrary; as Arghiri Emmanuel's *Unequal Exchange* and Samir Amin's *Unequal Development* have shown, global capital has much to gain from keeping the poor countries in structurally subaltern positions. If the vertigo induced by *Sans Soleil*'s abrupt passages from Asia to Africa and back suggests the difficulty of thinking in images the relationships between the world's most developed and its most destitute regions, that very vertigo and that very difficulty are also indications of the signal political importance of that imagination: as Gunder Frank also observes, "A mounting body of evidence suggests ... that the expansion of the capitalist system over the past centuries effectively and entirely penetrated even the apparently most isolated sectors of the underdeveloped world." (Rhodes 6)

Notice also that the idea of the development of underdevelopment contains a temporal irony, a recognition that backwardness is actually a fairly recent invention, that the apparent progress exported from the metropolises to the peripheral social formations may actually be regress; this has special relevance to a film whose broodings on time, on memory and on forgetfulness include both a temporal reading of the spirals of *Vertigo* and the outline of a fiction in which a time traveller has "forgotten forgetting," has become "a Third-Worlder of time," and is thus faced with precisely the question we have highlighted in the film, that of the simultaneous difficulty and necessity of linking images and sounds across time and space. We are told that this fiction within the fiction has been abandoned, but when we learn that it was to have been named *Sans Soleil*, we realize that

we are experiencing a retrospective resituation or reinscription of everything that we have already seen. Such meta-lepses are typical of Marker's work, but reach a kind of apotheosis in *Sans Soleil*, especially in its explicitly political imagery; consider Hayao Yameneko's video resynthesis of footage from the 1960s struggle of peasants and students against the airport at Narita. Consider also the image of Amilcar Cabral waving goodbye to the shore, accompanied by the bitter comment "He's right; he'll never see it again"; Cabral was assassinated, by a dissident member of his own party, on 20 January 1973, 18 months before the Portuguese recognition of the liberation of Guinea-Bissau. Finally, think of the footage of the military decoration of "Nino" (Joao Bernardo Vieira) by Amilcar Cabral's half-brother and successor Luiz, accompanied in evermore despairing hindsight by an account of the continued PAIGC infighting which led to the November 1980 coup of Nino against Luiz, Nino's installation in power, and the subsequent plots against his government. If the film is sometimes openly celebratory of movements of national liberation, congratulating the PAIGC across yet another transcontinental montage for provoking the 1974 crisis of the 48-year old Portuguese dictatorship, it is by no means the work of a political naif.

In the introduction I spoke of openness as the ultimate value of the way in which the editing strategies of *Sans Soleil* give rise to these political and historical questions, and in concluding this essay, I want to avoid any temptation to wrap things up too neatly. I say this for a number of reasons. Firstly, I recognize the possibility of another, less enthusiastic reading of the film, which would be harder on the political meaning of Marker's exile and more inclined to charge his film with tourism and exoticism. Secondly, the social formations which *Sans Soleil* explores most fully have both succeeded in significantly disorienting the established wisdom of history; countries like Guinea-Bissau were no more expected to become the epicentres of revolution than a country like Japan was expected to assume the leadership of global capital. Thirdly and consequently, this should warn us against future expectations of being able to predict history. Although we spoke earlier of two Western perceptions of Japan — the feudal society with modern overlay and the new anxiety about the pace of Japanese development — we should be aware that these are now challenged by an understanding of multina-

tional capital as effectively dissolving the meaning of national economies. According to Perry Anderson, "the radical internationalisation of the forces of production" is such that "no bourgeois society — not even the last great classically national economy, Japan — will be immune from the unpredictable tides and tempests of an uneven development whose elements are acquiring a well-nigh meteorological velocity around the world, across all frontiers." (Anderson 1986)

Around the world, across all frontiers. So far, I have suggested that *Sans Soleil* is ambitious (or foolhardy) enough to attempt a homology between the spectator's temporal experience in looking and listening, the director's temporal experience in shooting and editing, and nothing less than the temporality of global development and underdevelopment. This is also to propose that it is precisely in its most personal, evocative and fantasmatic moments that *Sans Soleil* can be most instructive. Late in the film, as the fiction proposed by the voiceover becomes more overtly a science-fiction, we begin to see the extent to which Tokyo is a place which allows Marker to effect a collage of places. To deploy Robert Smithson's term quite abusively, Tokyo is a non-site, liberating Marker from the social and historical burdens he seems to feel in France. Or, to deploy Marker's own term, the title of a book of photographs and commentaries both aesthetically continuous with *Sans Soleil* and yet markedly different in being concerned exclusively with Tokyo, Japan is *le dépayé*. Not simply the country of exile, *le dépayé* is a country which empties the meaning of country; for better or for worse, it is only from within the most economically "advanced" of regions that Marker is able to think the immediately unlikely but ultimately very powerful set of relations which binds the economic destiny of the Third World to such capitalist metropolises. At one point, *Sans Soleil's*

voiceover itself speaks of a collage of places, remarking on the improbability of a lighthouse in the desert on Sal, at least until one spots the ocean in the distance. In my discussion of the way in which the film links images of hyperdevelopment with images of underdevelopment, I hope I have similarly suggested both how unlikely the relationship immediately seems and yet how historically and politically important it finally proves.

Notes

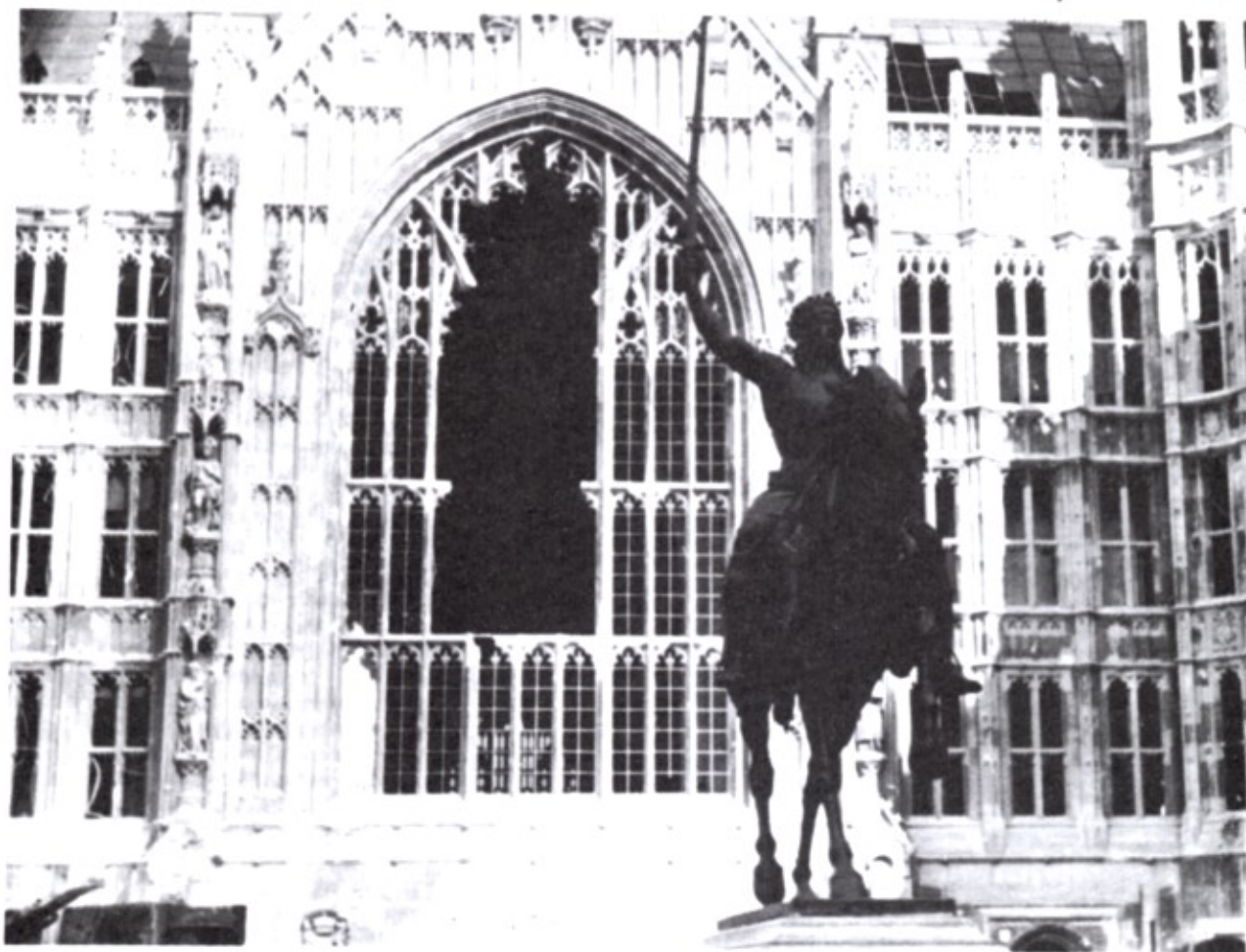
1. See Jacques Derrida, et al, in *Critical Inquiry* 12.1 (1985) and 13.1 (1986). Also see Argyros and Jay.
2. When I delivered a much earlier version of this paper at the Montreal meeting of the Society for Cinema Studies, scholars in attendance and also at work on Marker included Alan Casebier, Paul Coates, Constance Penley, and Michael Renov.

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Richard the Lionheart before the Palace of Westminster: The indestructibility of British imperialism (London Can Take It)



THEIR FINEST HOUR:

Humphrey Jennings and
the British Imperial Myth
of World War II

by Andrew Britton

Humphrey Jennings's reputation stands as high as that of any director in the history of the documentary, and he is widely regarded, in England at any rate, as one of the two or three greatest artists the British cinema has produced, if not the greatest *tout court*. Jim Hillier's judgment of Jennings' most famous film, *Fires Were Started*, is perfectly representative:

Although particularized in time and place, the film's formal and symbolic qualities, together with its humanity, give it a universal significance outside of time. It is the masterpiece not only of Jennings but also of the British documentary school and the whole British cinema.¹

My own disagreement with this evaluation of Jennings is extreme, and the reader is forewarned, therefore, that what follows definitely represents a minority viewpoint: Hillier's account

(and there is little else to point to) is all the more worth reading as a counter-balance. I should add, too, that while (naturally) I do not think I am biased, it is certainly true that my difficulty with Jennings's films is bound up with the fact that they seem to me to exemplify some extremely depressing things about official British culture in general, and the relationship to it of British social democracy in particular. Obviously, North American readers will not be capable of being depressed in the same way, and this may well affect their reaction to the films.

Jennings is in many ways an exceptionally attractive figure. He was a socialist and, unlike most British film directors of this period, he was also highly cultivated. His interest in culture, moreover, was both intelligent and advanced. It came under the heading of what would now be called "cultural studies," and throughout a large part of his life he was working on a book called *Pandemonium* (left unfinished at the time of his premature death) about the relationship between industry, science, literature and society in England since the Industrial Revolution. This political, or sociological, interest in the culture of the past was accompanied by an allegiance to modernism: Jennings helped to organise — and indeed, exhibited his own paintings in — the first Surrealist exhibition in London in 1936. At the same time, as we might expect from the subject of his book, Jennings was not in the least a cultural elitist: if Shakespeare, Milton and Blake were, for him, "a permanent frame of reference,"² he also knew and loved contemporary popular culture, and drew on it extensively in his work. Finally — as if all this were not enough — in an age in which Grierson was proclaiming that any preoccupation with aesthetics was trivial and that the virtue of the documentary was that it "allowed an adventure in the arts to assume the respectability of a public service,"³ Jennings had the temerity to suggest that English Renaissance theatre provided a model of an artistic practice in which poetry and social analysis ("*connaissance* — we have no word for it — naturally") were continuous with each other, and that "it still seems just a possibility" that British artists in the present might aspire to produce a similar synthesis.⁴ Nothing could sound more promising, and there would be every reason to expect that an artist with expressed interests and convictions of this kind would end up, in practice, creating major work. And yet — or so it seems to me — the promise

was not fulfilled, and in the work itself the interests and convictions, though in a sense present, are present in a notably debilitated, impoverished and conventional form. Jennings has been visibly defeated by the cultural situation in which he worked, and I want to suggest how and why this is so.

The War as Golden Age

We may begin with an incident, cited in Hillier's essay, in which one of the director's friends recalls Jennings' having told him, "firmly and passionately, that good films could only be made in times of disaster."⁵ This remark tells us a great deal, not only about Jennings's films, but also about the dominant British myth of the Second World War — a myth which was already there, as the films demonstrate, while the war was still being fought and which is incorrigibly there to this day. The myth has its basis in what was, objectively, Britain's unique situation in World War II: it was the only European country which, while being persistently blitzed, bombarded and threatened with invasion, was never actually occupied by German troops. Britain's experience of German imperialism was significantly different, therefore, from Poland's or France's or the Soviet Union's experience of it. There was carpet bombing and there was a Battle of Britain in which many people fought heroically and many people were killed: but no Nazi atrocities were committed on British soil, there were no concentration camps, there was no occupying army, there was no resistance movement — above all, perhaps, there was no experience of collaboration, either by the British ruling class, within which there was many a willing candidate, or by members of the general community. The ideology corresponding to Britain's peculiar and, comparatively speaking, privileged position in the Europe of the Third Reich has two principle components: it emphasises on the one hand the homogeneity, the unambiguous political unity, of British wartime society, and on the other the triumphant success of British resistance to invasion. The British fought as one man, and although there may have been times when we were down, we were most certainly never out. The central symbol of this ideology is the Blitz of London, and its exemplary charismatic image is the dome of St. Paul's rising with imperturbable majesty above the ruined landscape in the early morning as the all-clear sounds — the very em-

blem of the invincibility and the wholeness of British culture. In one version of them, these feelings about the war are very intimately connected to feelings about the Empire, and the war becomes the last moment at which it was possible to experience Britain (wrongly) as a great imperial power, but the imperialist content of the war myth (a myth which we may call "Churchillian") need not be this explicit and is, perhaps, more commonly sublimated into a sense of embattled, intransigent British isolation and exceptionalism. At the time of the Battle of Britain, Europe had fallen, the States had not yet entered the war, Britain stood alone — and, unlike "other countries," it won.

In one sense, of course, the social unity of wartime Britain was very real; and it is all the more necessary to distinguish carefully between the nature and conditions of the social solidarity on which the British war effort actually depended and the ideology of the war which was developing at the same time. For this solidarity had, in practice, a specific class character: it was directly contingent on the presence, within the wartime governing coalition, of representatives of the Labour Party and on the fact that the prosecution of the war was linked, more or less from the outset, to the planning of a number of fundamental domestic social reforms which were later implemented by the Labour government after 1945. British war unity was characterised, in other words, not by the suspension of class politics or class struggle but, on the contrary, by the British ruling class' recognition that it could not pursue its own war aim — to wit, the crushing of Germany's resistance to the hegemony of British imperialism — without making major political concessions to its own domestic class antagonist, large sections of which were intensely hostile to pre-war Toryism in general and to Churchill in particular. There could be no more striking evidence of the material content of the popular aspirations which secured the united British nation than Churchill's overwhelming defeat by Labour in the 1945 General Election; and indeed, the Welfare State was the victory which the British working class won by fighting the war. The ideology of war unity, by contrast, is continuous with the idea that "Britain-at-war" was a society in which class interests — identified, needless to say, with the pursuit of selfish and self-serving political goals by groups who ignore the interests of the social organism as a whole — were dissolved or transcended, and this ideology

has generated an emotion which can only be described as "war nostalgia." The war is recalled, with a lump in the throat — or, in Thatcherite rhetoric of the Falklands period, with crazed revivalist enthusiasm — as that magic moment when all the class and social contradictions of British culture evaporated and the British people, bloody but unbowed, enjoyed for a while a sense of common purpose and disinterested mutual dedication to a common cause which has since been tragically lost. While no one would claim that the United States, the USSR and France did not also develop their official myths of World War II, this nostalgic longing — this conviction that the war represents "the good old days" — is surely peculiar to the British case. It is impossible, I think, to imagine a Soviet representation of the siege of Stalingrad which fondly recalls the hours when the characters were trapped in the only building in the city which had not been captured by Nazi troops, or a Polish representation of the Warsaw ghetto which construes the German occupation as a lost utopia, but from a very early stage there was a British myth of the war as a golden age.

Fires Were Started

Fires Were Started shows us this ideology in the process of being manufactured; it is itself already a nostalgia movie (as Jim Hillier virtually concedes,⁶ though he does not pursue the logic of this description). The film was made in 1943, three years after the Blitz and British victory in the Battle of Britain and some months after the Red Army's triumph at Stalingrad, the turning point of the whole war. At this time, German air attacks on London had significantly diminished and the invasion of Britain, given Germany's disaster on the Eastern front, was no longer a real possibility: Jennings's actors were firemen who had been seconded from duty to take part in the filming. It is not strictly true, then, that the film was produced in "a time of disaster" (a perfectly appropriate phrase for the first three years of the war). On the contrary, it was produced at a moment when the Western allies and the Soviet Union had visibly conquered the initiative and when it had become apparent that Japan and the Third Reich could no longer win the war: the tide had also turned in North Africa, following the Allied landing in November 1942 and Montgomery's victory at El Alamein, and in the Pacific, at the Battle of Mid-

way. The "time of disaster" in which alone good films can be made must be conjured up for the purposes of making them, and Jennings accordingly returns to the moment of potential defeat: emotionally, potential defeat is an indispensable prerequisite of the successful enactment of war nostalgia because hardship and suffering are indispensable prerequisites in their turn of the ideal social unity which the war is supposed to represent.

Like so many war films, *Fires Were Started* is about the creation and consol-

envision the magical disappearance of British class society without ever having to confront the question of what, in practice, the struggle to achieve a classless society would involve. This society simply comes into being, courtesy of the Luftwaffe; and since the Luftwaffe is so urgently required to bring the vision of *Fires Were Started* into contact with the real world (to the satisfaction, at least, of Humphrey Jennings as a maker of documentaries), it is summoned up again to drop a few more incendiaries and create in general the state of univer-



Male bonding: The song sequence from *Fires Were Started*

idation, through combat and death, of an all-male group which is offered as a microcosm of the social order for which the men are fighting, and in this case the creation of the group embodies a fantasy about the reconciliation of classes: the central theme is the initiation of the middle-class fireman, Barrett (who is familiar with poetry), into a unit which otherwise consists of working men. The larger social hierarchy of civilian and military authority within which the group is inserted — and which is plainly, on the film's own showing, a class hierarchy — is noted in passing and then taken completely for granted: the class-free male bonding of the fire-fighting unit may well correspond to some kind of social ideal, but it has no more extensive social implications, and it certainly does not inspire any reckless challenging, or even tentative questioning, of class structures external to the group. Jennings's emotional investment in the Blitz — or rather, in the idea of it — is an investment in highly specialised social conditions which allow him to

sal misery on which the realisation of the film's utopia depends.

Consider, for example, the famous song sequence: its subject, explicitly, is the invocation of the classless male group by the new middle-class recruit through the performance of "popular" (that is, in the film's terms, "class-free") music. Barrett, sitting at the piano, strikes up "One Man Went To Mow"; one by one, in obedience to the strains of each successive verse, the jolly workers enter; with the appearance of the last man, the air-raid siren promptly sounds. The sequence is a *locus classicus* of the sentimental self-deception for which *Fires Were Started* is consistently remarkable. Jennings clearly thinks that he is saying — and requires us to think that we are feeling — "Oh, my God! Here they come again! How terrible!" The sentiment which the film actually expresses, however, is "Thank God they're back!" Without those bombs raining down, a British film director committed to socialist ideals would be obliged to turn his attention to the Brit-

ish rather than to the German state, but as things are the external enemy can be allowed to distract us from the impediments to those ideals which exist in Great Britain itself. The allegedly classless group is constituted within British class society — and, moreover, in its defence; but because of the Germans, the protection of this society and the fantasy of transcending it can be experienced as one and the same thing.

In fact, of course, the male group is not classless at all, as we may readily deduce from the fact that Barrett figures in the song sequence as its Orpheus. *Fires Were Started* is primarily engaged by the idea of the acceptance of a middle-class intellectual by the workers as "one of us": having undergone a rite of passage (literally, a baptism of fire), Barrett is enrolled as an honorary member of the working class in the context of a social world which continues to be organised by structures of class power. In that this fantasy of a more equitable and comradely life is unhappily contingent on other people being blown to smithereens, we are perhaps entitled to claim that the fantasy is a rather insensitive, or at the least a thoughtless, one, and it is obviously significant in this connection that Jennings almost completely ignores the suffering caused by the Blitz. No civilians are killed, not a soul is made homeless, the fire which the characters are fighting takes place in a deserted warehouse, and the narrative's suspense (such as it is) derives from the danger that the fire will spread, not to anybody's home, but to a munitions ship (also deserted) at anchor down the road. Bombs fall, but the plucky telephonist picks herself up, dusts herself off, and starts all over again. The Blitz, in this supposed documentary, is utterly and grotesquely unreal: it is reduced to little more than a portentous symbolic thing the virtue of which is that it allows the business of cross-class male bonding to proceed. The role of women in the film consists of answering the telephone, providing the chaps (or blokes) with pints of beer to speed them on their way, and wheeling round the tea-trolley to welcome them home again. Naturally, in the documentary context the film's system of gender roles is camouflaged by the usual documentary alibi: the firemen actually were firemen in real life, and women actually *did* answer the phone and make cups of tea. This alibi is, as always, completely spurious, and once we have taken note that the realistic effect of *Fires Were Started* is continuous with the naturalisation of a dra-

matic world which is strikingly stilted and factitious — which is hardly distinguishable, indeed, from the dramatic worlds of contemporary British fictional war films — then the alibi collapses in ruins. Jennings' vision of the end, or erasure, of class does not extend to a vision of the end of patriarchy, and as we shall see when we come to *A Diary for Timothy*, the sexism of his work is a critical symptom of a more pervasive imaginative and political debility.

If no civilians are killed in *Fires Were Started*, one of the firemen is; and the

from various fertility myths, and he appears in the poem as an avatar of the fertility god whose death redeems, and restores the fecundity of, the earth. Hillier himself does not suggest that there is a connection between Jacko and the Hanged Man, but in the light of Jennings's interest both in the Tarot and in Eliot the relationship seems fairly obvious, and two rather different issues arise from it. In the first place, I think we may claim with something like certainty that no one who had not been expressly told that Humphrey Jennings



The Hanged Man: Jacko in *Fires Were Started*

death of Jacko, the emotional crux of the film, provides a useful point of transition to the analysis of *Diary*. Jacko raises in a particularly acute form the problematic nature of the role played in Jennings's movies by his intellectual and cultural interests. Jim Hillier makes the point that the war was associated in Jennings's mind with the symbolism of Tarot cards: he identified the Blitz with "la Maison Dieu," a card which represents a house struck by fire from heaven and which functions in the Tarot pack as an image of cosmic fatality.⁷ Tarot symbolism entered modern bourgeois high culture by way of "The Wasteland," and one's suspicion that Jennings (who greatly admired Eliot) derived his interest in the Tarot from this source is confirmed by the remarkable similarity between his treatment of Jacko and Eliot's use of another key Tarot card, "le Pendu." In "The Wasteland" the Hanged Man is one component of an elaborate symbolic structure derived

was interested in Tarot cards could possibly deduce this interest from the mere reading of *Fires Were Started*, and to this extent the symbolism of "la Maison Dieu" remains purely private, an esoteric personal preoccupation of the artist's. The symbolism is not realised in the film and plays no part whatever in its communicated significance, and this extraordinary discrepancy between private intention and enacted public meaning is suggestive of the extent of Jennings's imaginative disengagement, both from the material reality of what purports to be his subject matter (Britain at war), and from the audience whose long-suffering heroism he believes himself to be valorising. Perhaps the point can best be made by saying that while Hitchcock did not suppose that the audience of *Psycho* would be familiar with psychoanalytic theory, nor Sirk that the spectator of *Imitation of Life* would have an expert's knowledge of the theory and practice of epic thea-

tre, we do not feel in watching these films that they have been written in an arcane metalanguage which is accessible to their authors but not to the people in the stalls. On the contrary, Sirk's and Hitchcock's intellectual interests, which derive from bourgeois "high culture," manifest themselves in their work as the profound exploration, and reinvention, of the expressive possibilities of the popular artistic forms of the thriller and the melodrama, and it is taken for granted that the "intellectual interests" (if that's the right phrase) can be, as *dramatised*, communicated to the audience for which the films have been made. In *Fires Were Started*, we cannot escape the impression that the audience is being patronised. "Here," the film seems to say, "is the experience of the British at war. To me it means 'la Maison Dieu.' The British at war, noble as they are, won't get it, and it doesn't matter whether they do or not." This assumption that the sensibilities of the director and the anticipated spectator are radically different, and the accompanying attitude of class patronage, are endemic to sponsored documentary film-making in Britain in the '30s and '40s, and they help to explain why Jennings's commitment to both "high" and "popular" culture, which looks so promising in theory, fails to achieve an adequate correlative in his artistic practice.

Secondly, when we return to *Fires Were Started* armed with the knowledge that it is indeed informed by the symbolism of the Tarot pack, we are primarily struck (it seems to me) by how little the difference is that this knowledge makes. The symbolism adds nothing to the complexity or richness or resonance of the film's imagery, but only confirms its impoverishment by introducing a rather more pretentious, mystified, and alienated gloss of the simple literal meanings we would have picked up in any case. It was already apparent that the film construes the Blitz as an abstract symbolic event which allows men of different classes to bond. To be told that as far as the director was concerned this symbolic event was the fire from heaven which strikes the imprudent unawares but which may also prefigure some form of ultimate enlightenment or unification is merely to have confirmed one's initial impression that the attitude to the Blitz in *Fires Were Started* is grossly unacceptable. The construction of Jacko as "le Pendu," the sacrificial fertility god, makes it clearer still that Jennings is, in effect, looking to the Nazi blitzkrieg for redemption: the British have been, or

will be, bombed into transcendent national unity, and the deaths (suitably distanced and mythologised) which unfortunately result are thus redemptive in that it is through them that the unity is achieved. *Night Mail*, in 1935, had represented this unity as the existing reality of pre-war British society, at once embodied by and achieved through the wage labour of a representative group of workers. By the time we get to 1943, the same unity is understood to be contingent on a perpetual rain of high explosives. *Fires Were Started*, it might be said — to adapt a famous phrase — is the continuation of *Night Mail* by other means.

A Diary for Timothy

A *Diary for Timothy* was made a little over a year after *Fires Were Started*, between the summer of 1944 and the spring of 1945, just before the war

system along the British coastline is being dismantled, six years of the most excruciating warfare in human history are finally drawing to a close — and Humphrey Jennings is languishing in a quagmire of bitterness, disappointment and depression. He seems altogether happier with the Battle of Arnhem, which, in that it was a total disaster, allowed the British to go on suffering as one nation for a few months longer. "Death came to many of us by telegram on Christmas Eve," intones Micheal Redgrave on the soundtrack a propos the human costs of Hitler's last offensive on the Western front: but on the other hand it is death which binds us together — and what on earth are we going to do without it? Confronted with the imminent defeat of European fascism, Jennings can do no more than comfort himself with the thought that peace is "just as dangerous" as war, that mining accidents will continue even if air raids



Jennings (centre) prepares a close-up of the Messiah (*A Diary for Timothy*)

ended: it is Jennings's last major work, and it shows us, with painful clarity, where war nostalgia lead him; even if the film had not been made it might have been guessed, I think, that *this* is where a man who relied on World War II to reconstitute, through hardship and self-abnegation, a lost organic culture would inevitably end up. The war is nearly over, though one would never know it. The Red Army has crossed the Vistula, the American and British armies are sweeping over the Rhine, Warsaw is being liberated, the defence

do not, and that the future may well be even more appalling than the past.

At one level, of course, the whole point of the film is that it is the business of Timothy, the beaming bourgeois baby to whom the diary is addressed, to make sure that peace was worth fighting for, but nevertheless the investment in imagining the future as a sort of prolongation of the war is unmistakable: by 1944, war has become for Jennings the glue which holds Britain together. This spiritual need for the war explains the absence, here and throughout Jen-

nings's work, of any sense of the tragic and the mood of enervation — the shocking lack of moral and emotional energy — with which he contemplates the prospect of the end of hostilities. Jacko dies in *Fires Were Started* and death comes to many of us in *A Diary for Timothy*, but these deaths are poetical abstractions and the idea of death involved is essentially that voiced in the poem which Jennings obliges one of his firemen to read aloud in *Fires Were Started*: "O eloquent, just and mighty Death" — a curious sentiment, it might have been thought, in the context of the Second World War. The war is experienced, and recreated, as a solemn national pageant in which, war being war, death naturally figures; but while there is no doubt a vague atmosphere of melancholy it is no part of Jennings's purpose, and it is perhaps beyond his powers, to dramatise any feeling of pain or loss or waste or suffering. The deaths are as purely emblematic as the lives which preceded them, moments of pathos in a national spectacle whose concrete reality is already distanced and attenuated, even as it takes place, by a thick crust of nationalist metaphor. One of Jennings's major themes is that "Britain Can Take It" (to quote the title of one of his first wartime films), but he

never really conveys what "taking it" involves. Again, it is the *idea*, in the abstract, of "British resistance" which inspires him — if "inspires" is the word for these rather frigid texts. There is no equivalent anywhere in Jennings's work for Capra's presentment of the siege of Leningrad in *The Battle of Russia* or — even more strikingly — for his presentment of the Blitz in *The Battle of Britain*. Capra understands the Blitz, not as "la Maison Dieu," but as a practical struggle, and it is the sense of a practical struggle which he communicates, whatever the ideologies are in terms of which that struggle is perceived. Jennings's Londoners, by contrast, are not historical persons but archetypes, who live and die as signifiers of a mythic national *geist*.

Since it is disaster which constitutes the nation and which permits Humphrey Jennings to make good movies, the end of disaster arouses nothing but gloom: there is going to be a national crisis and a crisis of narrative material. The really pressing question, therefore, is whether or not the white, male middle-class baby will be able to "cope with freedom," and Jennings can only resolve this agonising doubt by offering Timothy to us as a potential national Messiah. In the Christmas sequence,

which culminates in a close shot of his chubby cheeks with "O Come All Ye Faithful" blazing on the soundtrack, Timothy is explicitly identified with Christ, to whose unusual domestic situation his own exactly corresponds. The Father is absent (though under modern conditions, and through the good offices of the GPO, it is possible for God to communicate with his only-begotten son by mail) and the mother, it would seem, since she can hardly be thought of as the type to go sleeping around, is a virgin. Those requiring confirmation of the ignominious nature of the role assigned to women in *Fires Were Started* need look no further than *A Diary for Timothy*, in which that role has been reduced to the thankless task of giving birth to the Saviour.

If the embarrassing excessiveness and insistence of this imagery of miraculous redemption convey anything, however, it is the willed, hopeless and desperate lack of conviction with which Jennings resorts to it: one's sense of creative possibility in the future must be pretty well exhausted if one is obliged, in defining it, to speculate on the imminence of the Second Coming, and of course, for all Jennings's rhetorical inflation of his innocuous protagonist, it is the spirit of exhaustion which prevails. Jennings's



A bourgeois nativity (*A Diary for Timothy*)

real attitude to the shape of things to come is very much more adequately conveyed by his injured airman's ambition to go to the South Seas, become a beachcomber, and do nothing at all. Now that he is no longer fighting, Jennings has lost interest in him. He cannot be imagined as being anything but a "British airman" or as aspiring to anything, once he is out of uniform, but a life of feckless indolence - in a foreign country! Indeed, the most disturbing and unpleasant feature of *A Diary for Timothy* is the way in which, the war over, the archetypal British — so admirable when they were suffering and dying as one nation — become the focus of a quite different set of feelings, and the emphasis now falls on their susceptibility to the lure of venal moral relaxation on coral islands and the fear that they will be unable to sustain, under conditions of peacetime comfort (or worse), the bracing sense of common purpose which came so readily when they were being bombed. This attitude to the audience is implicit in the film's commentary, the more tellingly so for Jennings's abandonment of voice-over narration in his earlier war-time films. On the face of it, the commentary is addressed to Timothy, but it is also plainly addressed to the film's spectators, whom Jennings now views as a collection of moral infants which stands in urgent need of exhortation and admonishment. The tone is that of a kindly but earnest headmaster who feels he has reason to believe that every one of his pupils is about to go to the bad.

The nature of the position which Jennings has reached is painfully betrayed in the extraordinary sequence built around a performance of the graveyard scene from *Hamlet*: the production, starring John Gielgud, is represented as taking place in contemporary London so as to naturalise the sequence in terms of the documentary convention. We begin with the gravedigger's famous joke about the English: asked by Hamlet (who is, of course, in disguise) why the Prince of Denmark has been sent to England, the gravedigger replies that it is because Hamlet is mad: " 'twill not be seen in him there; there the men are as mad as he." Uproarious laughter in the theatre. Jennings then cuts to a group of rescue workers on a bomb site, one of whom, thinking he has found a survivor under the rubble, calls sharply for quiet, thus initiating a standard British comic routine whereby a request for silence, passed from mouth to mouth, generates more and more noise. It transpires,

however, that the warning is a false alarm, and the rescue-worker turns to his companions and tells them, off-handedly, to "carry on." We then cut back to the theatre for Hamlet's great speech to the skull of Yorick, the king's jester: "Where be your jibes now, your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar? Not one now to mock your own grinning?"

What Jennings thought that he was doing in this sequence it is impossible to tell: the enacted meaning is distressingly clear, but one cannot imagine it to have been fully conscious. The "British-at-war" have become a stale joke: the rescue-workers are extras in a Will Hay comedy, there is no body buried under the ruins. As we have seen, the war was never fully real for Jennings in the first place, but now that its end is in sight heroic firemen and sacrificial hanged men are replaced by generic Cockneys and the British character becomes the

disgust. In the new context created for the speech by Jennings Hamlet's reaction to the skull, critically placed by Shakespeare, is surreptitiously endorsed, and the speech comes to represent Jennings's feeling about the inhabitant of the bombed-out house, about the British he has mythologised, about the myth of the war he has dedicated himself to perpetuating. "Dost thou think Alexander looked o' this fashion i' the earth?" "E'en so" "And smelt so? pah!" In the midst of all the spurious uplift about Timothy, salvation and the fragile promise of fresh young life, Hamlet's "pah!" tells us where *A Diary for Timothy* actually stands. At a moment when one might have thought that an artist with socialist sympathies would be pondering what might be made of the massive defeat of the European right, Jennings recalls the past, and anticipates the coming period, from a position of total nihilism.



"My gorge rises at it": Gielgud (centre) is Hamlet in the graveyard scene (*A Diary for Timothy*)

object of a querulous and cynical irony which culminates in the juxtaposition, through parallel montage, of Yorick's skull, unearched by the gravedigger, and the absent bomb-site victim. Shakespeare uses Hamlet's speech to dramatise his protagonist's neurotic revulsion from death. Hamlet once loved Yorick ("Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft"), but in death he becomes nothing more than a symbol of the futility and transience of life in the body, and the speech ends with Hamlet throwing the skull aside in

Jennings and the British Documentary Tradition

It goes without saying that more is at stake here than the personal sensibility of Humphrey Jennings: his sensibility is representative. Jim Hillier ends his essay with the words: "Perhaps, consciously or unconsciously, (Jennings) lacked a new vision, confidence in the future. And perhaps the world he looked at lacked it too."⁸ The world he looked at? — all of it? Jennings is very different from John Grierson (typically,

Grierson thought him a dilettante), but they have in common the fact that their enthusiasm for "the people" and "the common Man," and their conviction of "the dignity of the worker," absolutely depend on the common Man's being safely contained by the social order of the capitalist nation state. He is, of course, a marvel, but he is marvellous only in his capacity as a working part of the organic social body. Jennings takes over this attitude to "the British people," quite uncritically, from the British documentary tradition which his own work continues, and although the attitude is obviously deeply conservative, the tradition encouraged Jennings to mistake it for a form of socialism. Grierson, after all, was capable of advancing the astonishing claim that "*Night Mail* and *Housing Problems* were the films of a Tory régime gradually going socialist"⁹ (though he does not tell us whether or not this remarkable tendency on the part of the Baldwin administration was successfully consummated under Chamberlain and Churchill); and Harry Watt could say in all sincerity that "we were trying to give an image of the working man, away from the Edwardian, Victorian, capitalist attitudes."¹⁰ The intellectual and political confusion, or disingenuousness, implied by that list of adjectives and that description of *Night Mail* forewarn us of what we have to expect when we watch the films, and while Jennings was very much more sophisticated than either Watt or Grierson his sophistication, given his failure to question the assumptions embedded in the tradition and conventions he inherited, was not of much help to him. "He was attracted by the imaginative materialism of Marxism but felt, for example, that Blake's *Song of Los* said all there was to be said about owners and men in the context of the Industrial Revolution and 'says it much better than Marx did.'"¹¹ It may be agreed that Blake developed a profound critique of the Industrial Revolution which retains its importance to this day, but to argue that this critique is "better" than Marx's is nonsensical and absurd, and the principle effect of Jennings' remark is to call into question the nature of the allegiance to Blake. We may feel that an artist who finds himself praising Blake on these grounds would also be ill-equipped to criticise the conventions of the British documentary from a socialist position, and might

even end up using them in such a way that no one could deduce he was familiar with Blake's critique of industrialism at all. It seems reasonable to suppose that Jennings's conviction of Blake's superiority to Marx as a critic of capitalist society has to do with Blake's being British and with the fact that Blake tried to convince himself, in his later work, that Jerusalem could be built again "in England's green and pleasant land." Leavis has argued that the belief in the possibility of restoring Jerusalem represents the weakness (inevitable in the given historical circumstances) of Blake's position¹² but whether or not one agrees, as I do, it is quite indisputable that there is something very wrong with a love of Blake which leads, in practice, to the assertion that Jerusalem will be created by Timothy, and nothing could be more remote from the intensity and moral passion of Blakean "imagination" than the inertia and inanition characteristic of late Jennings. The idea of Jerusalem has degenerated, in *A Diary for Timothy*, into mawkish bourgeois escapism which can be correlated, on the one hand, with Jennings' refusal, or inability, to conceptualise the transformation of the social world in concrete terms and on the other with the flaccid and indulgent despair in which he emerges from the Second World War. "It will all have to go, it has been a terrible mistake!" he apparently remarked near the end of his life, "surveying the industrial landscape of Battersea."¹³ This sentiment is the exact counterpart of the hope that England will be redeemed by Timothy, and it is just about as helpful.

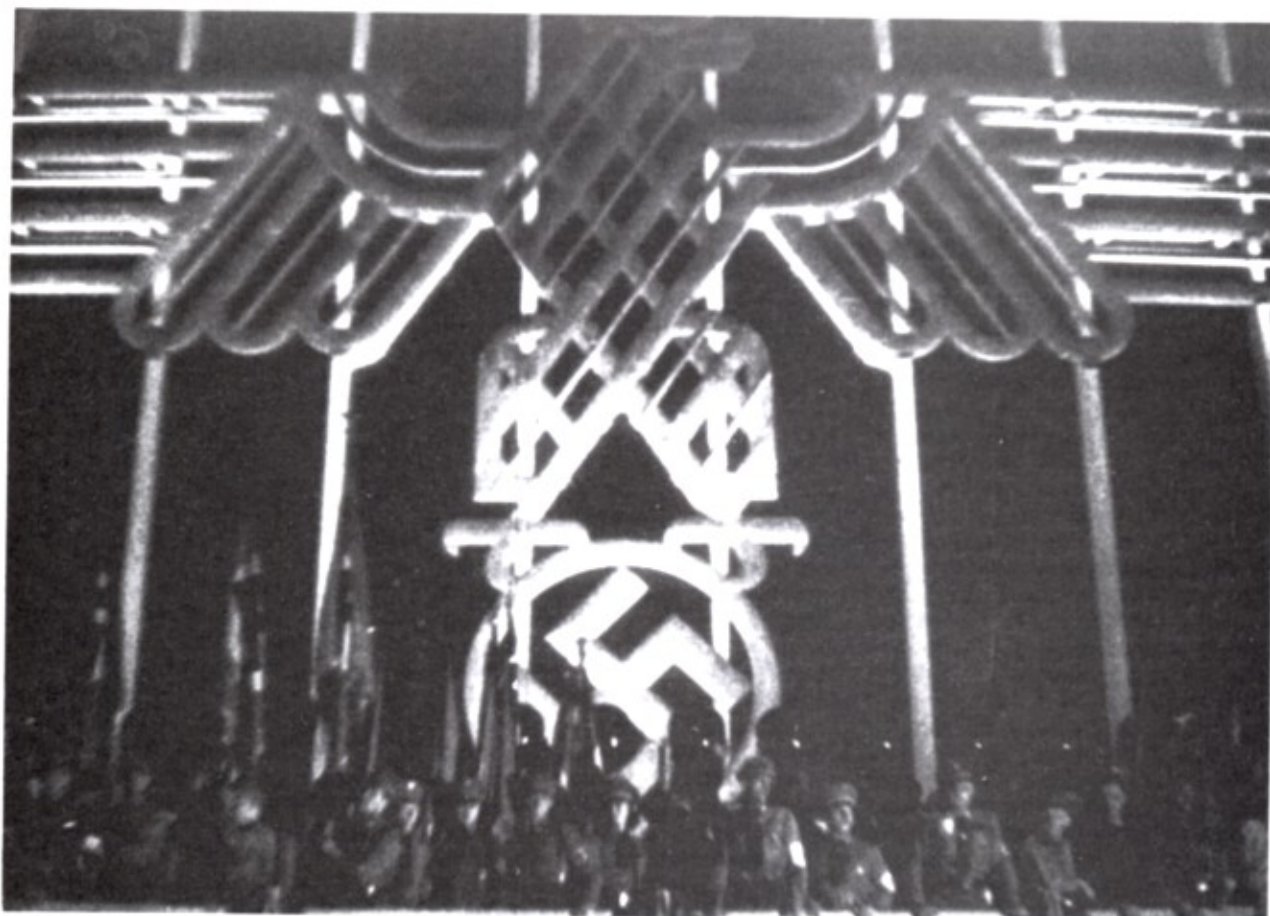
In the context of the British documentary tradition, which was the only cinematic tradition which Jennings had behind him, all his potential strengths go for nothing: they are turned, in fact, into positive weaknesses. His ardent and informed preoccupation with English cultural history is assimilated to an idealistic, and almost mystical, English nationalism; his attraction to "the imaginative materialism of Marxism" and the Blake of *The Song of Los* is reduced to sentimental populism; and his complex and wide-ranging aesthetic allegiances manifest themselves as the kind of pretentious bombast which passes for Art in 30s British (and American) documentary film-making. The beautiful images of *A Diary for Timothy*, and E.M. Forster's unctuous commen-

tary, embody the same notion of cultural seriousness which produces the pastiche of Whitman on the soundtrack of *The River*, Auden's ode to the Post Office in *Night Mail* and Virgil Thomson's sub-modernist musical scores, and while we cannot doubt that Jennings genuinely loved Shakespeare and Milton and Beethoven they appear in his work only as museum pieces — as "High Culture" in the most conventional, academic and deadening sense.

The weaknesses of the British documentary tradition are, in effect, the weaknesses of British social democracy: an account of why *Industrial Britain* and *Night Mail* and *A Diary for Timothy* are bad films turns inexorably into an account of the drastic ideological limitations of Labourism, and in particular of its historical failure to disengage itself from, or provide, a coherent and intelligible alternative to, the assumptions and discourses of the dominant class culture. "Jennings's political views were certainly left-wing,"¹⁴ but these views do not get into his work, and if one were asked to give one's reasons for saying that his films could not have been made by a high Tory it would be difficult to do so on the basis of their politics. He hopes vaguely for a better world: that is about it. This world, however, though better, will not be in any essential way different, and if Jennings is completely incapable of formulating any progressive social aim or project that is because he is imaginatively complicit in the very ideologies which such a project would be obliged to contest.

Footnotes

1. Jim Hillier, "Humphrey Jennings": in Alan Lovell and Jim Hillier, *Studies in Documentary*: Viking Press, New York 1972, p. 98.
2. *ibid.*, p. 63.
3. *ibid.*, p. 70.
4. *ibid.*, p. 71.
5. *ibid.*, p. 110.
6. *ibid.*, p. 90.
7. *ibid.*, p. 91 et. seq.
8. *ibid.*, p. 120.
9. Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*: OUP, New York 1983, p. 100.
10. *ibid.*, p. 90.
11. Hillier, *op. cit.* p. 65.
12. F. R. Leavis, *Nor Shall My Sword*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1971.
13. Hillier, *op. cit.* p. 121.
14. *ibid.*, p. 65.



FASCISM / CINEMA

by Robin Wood

The juxtaposition of two films offers an appropriate starting-point: *Triumph of the Will*, Leni Riefenstahl's record of the 1934 Nuremberg rally; and *Night and Fog*, Alain Resnais' documentary on the concentration camps, made twenty years later: the 'before' and 'after' of Nazism vividly commemorated. Whatever one may think of the two films artistically, they are invaluable social documents (in more ways

than — in either case — their makers can have intended); their value as such is greatly enhanced when they are placed side by side. Indeed, the respective kinds of 'art' they represent form an inseparable part of their social/ideological significance: an obvious enough point, but one that tends to get blurred by critics who believe that 'art' can somehow be divorced from politics.

I do not wish to enter into the ques-

tion of intentionality in Riefenstahl's film on a personal level — the question of whether she knew what she was doing, of 'innocent' or 'guilty' of knowingly condoning Nazism: that has been dealt with definitively by Susan Sontag in her brilliant essay 'Fascinating Fascism' (most easily accessible, perhaps, in Bill Nichols' anthology *Movies and Methods* Vol. 1). Hitler partly staged the rally for Riefenstahl's cameras; the film

is the product, not of one woman, but of a historical moment, of a specific movement within western culture. It is not just a film 'about' Fascism, but a Fascist film: it celebrates a leader and a party that sought total domination, and it seeks totally to dominate its audience. Every technical and stylistic device is chosen to impose a single, simple and unquestioned view on the spectator. The opening establishes Hitler as a god descending from heaven through the clouds, bringing 'revelation' to Nuremberg, Germany and the world; the film culminates in (a) Hitler's declaration that God has predetermined the rise and triumph of the Nazi party, and (b) the statement that 'Hitler is Germany and Germany Hitler.' No complexity or freedom of response is permitted at any point: one can only accept or reject the film *in toto*, as it allows no space for the critical-exploratory movement of thought and imagination. Music (Wagner and nationalist songs) is used purely emotively, as reinforcement; camera angles are ubiquitously dictatorial (low, personally to ennoble some very undistinguished-looking individuals, high, to display the spectacle of the Nazi military machine); the editing is elaborately and insistently rhythmic, reproducing on the formal level the notion of intricate mechanization.

A word must be said about the common 'liberal' view of the film as ideologically monstrous but aesthetically irresistible. The following is characteristic:

Difficult though it may be for almost any contemporary spectator to divorce himself altogether from attitudes towards the materials out of which the film is made, even such committedly left-wing, dedicatedly anti-Nazi writers as Paul Rotha have had to admit that there is little or nothing Leni Riefenstahl did not know about film-making, that her mastery of editing was comparable with Eisenstein's, and that the film, whatever one's attitude towards its content, does transcend that content and compel one to judge it absolutely as a film.

- John Russell Taylor,
in that prestigious publication
Cinema: A Critical Dictionary

Faced with contemptible drivel such as this, it is difficult to know where to begin: with Taylor's quaint, antiquated notion of what constitutes a 'left-wing' writer; with his apparent sense of the *desirability* of the contemporary spectator's divorcing himself 'altogether' (or to any degree at all?) from 'attitudes towards the materials' (in the name of

some mystical aestheticism?); with his apparent desire to distinguish himself from 'dedicatedly anti-Nazi writers'; with the notion that Riefenstahl's mechanical text-book editing shows 'a mastery . . . comparable with Eisenstein's'; or with the question of how exactly one judges something 'absolutely as a film' — even what that might mean, in terms of simple sense. Of course, *Triumph of the Will* is a 'well-made film': that is, like, for example, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, it displays a high level of professional competence (it is possible to think of a number of far more admirable films that don't). In fact, Riefenstahl's camera-rhetoric is extremely limited and monotonous: comparison with Eisenstein's emotionally and intellectually complex montage can only be to her great disadvantage, as the most elementary analysis of representative sequences would quickly demonstrate. What is fundamentally objectionable about Taylor's position, however, is its implicit notion of some kind of 'absolute' beauty. The notion of beauty is, on the contrary, always culturally determined: if we develop even the most rudimentary political awareness, it becomes necessary to *choose* the kind of beauty we support, the kind of pleasure that we enjoy. The alleged beauty of *Triumph of the Will* is a Fascist beauty, centred on dehumanization, mechanization, the drive to domination, militarism. If one does not succumb to the Fascist lure, one can only find the film uniformly boring and repellent.

Night and Fog briefly quotes from Riefenstahl's film, and the connection established intensifies one's sense of the efficacy of Resnais' as antidote: obviously enough in terms of content, but also in terms of style. The emotional impact of the material can scarcely not be overwhelming; but Resnais and his writer Jean Cayrol do everything possible to allow the spectator distance and analytical freedom. The film attempts to make it possible to contemplate the unendurable. The achieved distance has the effect, paradoxically, of *increasing* awareness of the appalling nature of what is shown: instead of being numbed by horrors, the spectator's capacity for thought, imagination and empathy is given scope and freedom. One is struck here (especially in comparison with Riefenstahl) by the complexity of means and effects within a half-hour documentary. Music is used as counterpoint rather than reinforcement; similarly, the cool, concise narration continuously counterpoints (without undercutting) the emotional impact of the images. The

entire film is built on a complex pattern of formal alternations that foreground the medium, so that the sense of actuality is constantly paralleled by an awareness of filmic discourse: present/past, colour/black-and-white, moving film/stills, stylised camera-movement/authentic newsreel. We are encouraged — up to a certain point — to *think* about what we see. Like Fascism itself, *Triumph of the Will* depends upon passivity, upon the readiness to accept, be led, be manipulated, be indoctrinated; *Night and Fog* presupposes the viewer's active intelligence.

It is easy to surrender to the film in admiration of its achievement; yet the more times I see it (influenced, certainly, by Peter Harcourt's excellent article on Resnais' documentaries in *Film Comment* Nov./Dec. 1973), the more I am aware of that 'certain point,' the more I am left at the end with dissatisfaction, even anger. One cannot clearly separate the film's 'poetry' from its attempts to create distance; but as it progresses one has a growing sense that poetry is being substituted for analysis, that, as much as it is a means of defining a sensitive and civilised attitude to the ultimately appalling, it is also a means of evasion and concealment. It is surely impossible not to be deeply affected by the ending, in which the camp authorities, on trial, from high to low, commandant to kapo, disclaim responsibility, and the film leaves us with the question, 'Then who is responsible?'. Yet, unsupported by any effort to analyse the roots and sources of Fascism in western culture (which liberals, perhaps, cannot afford to do beyond a 'certain point'), the film is able to avoid suggesting what the answer might be, whether in fact there *is* one, or, indeed, whether the more pertinent question might not be 'What is responsible?'. In fact, what we are so tempted to surrender to may be not so much the film's intelligence and sensitivity as its seductive despair; and despair, while understandable enough as a response to the enormities we have been made to look at, is never a very helpful emotion. What the ending leaves us with is liberalism's familiar hands-in-the-air gesture of appalled helplessness: these things have happened before; they will happen again; they are a part of nature or 'the human condition'; there is nothing we can do. The film's position strongly reminds one of Freud's 'compulsion to repeat,' which he elevated from an accurate clinical perception to a very dubious eternal metaphysical principle. Michael Schneider comments (in *Neurosis and Civilisation*): ' . . . like decadent

bourgeois philosophers he [Freud] mistook the "death instinct" of a murderous and suicidal class, the imperialist bourgeoisie, for the "instinctive nature of man as such". Resnais and Cayrol repeat the error. It is my purpose here (with the two films still present as guides or 'markers') to suggest the lines along which an analysis of the sources of Fascism, and an adequate theoretical opposition to it, might be developed.

A dictionary definition offers a simple starting-point:

Fascism: Principles and organization of the patriotic and anti-communist movement in Italy started during the 1914-18 war, culminating in the dictatorship of Mussolini, and imitated by Fascist or blackshirt associations in other countries.

Concise OED

The dictionary goes on to refer us to the Latin word *fascis*: 'Bundles of rods with axe in the middle carried by lictors before high magistrate; ensigns of authority.'

The definition (besides establishing that Fascism is both theory and practice, 'principles and organization') gives us three of its essential components: the emphasis on nationalism (and 'patriotism,' however its defenders may describe it, always has a habit of transforming itself into imperialism); the opposition to communism (which underlines the opportunism and grotesqueness of the phrase 'National Socialism') — this at the time before Soviet communism had hardened into Stalinism under the pressure of the forces of reaction, when the Russian Revolution might still have been regarded as inaugurating a new, international, society based on true liberation and equality; the logical progression towards the enthronement of a supreme authority-figure (Duce, Fuhrer, God). The Latin derivation suggests that, even if the term Fascism should *strictly* be applied only to a highly specific twentieth century movement, its basic impulses and tendencies go right back through human history and are readily apparent around us today; in calling *Triumph of the Will* and *Night and Fog* 'invaluable social documents' I had in mind less their illumination of events in another time and another place than the light they can throw on our contemporary cultural situation. 'Authority' is clearly the key word: Fascism, built on the notion of the right to domination and power over others, backed wherever necessary by force and coercion, simply carries the

authority principle to its logical culmination.

Against (or beside) the image of a Fascist society, let us place our own. It bears the label 'democracy,' and is nourished by certain sustaining myths of freedom and equality. Rationally regarded, it can be seen to be built on inter-locking structures of power/domination/oppression:

rich	oppress	poor
employers		employees
men		women
whites		non-whites
straights		gays
adults		children

In short, there are *potentially* Fascist tendencies all around us and within us, ineradicable at the level of the individual because inscribed in the social conditions of our lives, informing our relationships (public and private), in our offices, our classrooms, our sitting-rooms, our bedrooms. Putting together the items in the above list gives us the privileged figure of our culture, the white upper- or middle-class adult heterosexual male. At risk of alienating many of my readers, I have to say that, given the conditions of our culture, from its economic base to its ideological superstructure, such a figure is inherently Fascist. We are of course speaking here of an ideological construct; it is not impossible for *individuals* to transcend it or negate its components (though they can do so only with great difficulty and determination, through a grueling process of awareness, self-discipline and self-abnegation). It is perhaps surprising how many succeed: some of my best friends are white upper- or middle-class adult heterosexual males.

Where did this begin? At that moment in pre-history when the two major foundations of our culture were laid: the institution of private property; the institution of patriarchy. The two apparently coincided — which was not, of course, a 'coincidence' in the popular sense of the term. The right to private ownership — substituting competition for co-operation, setting human beings against each other in the struggle for possession — seems immediately to have gone beyond the right to own land and objects, to include the right to own *people*: the victor's ownership of captives, the master's ownership of slaves, the man's ownership of women. Private ownership brings with it the institution of marriage, monogamy, the patriarchal family. Have things changed that much?

We still talk familiarly of employees as 'wage-slaves' and of women as 'domestic slaves'; the so-called 'sexual perversion' of sado-masochism simply acts out the implications of the basic power-relations within all our cultural institutions. If one defines Fascist *tendencies* as the drive for power over others, one can see that they are expressed in a great deal of our daily vocabulary. Everyone knows that terms like 'nigger', 'yid', 'faggot' carry Fascist overtones (they were invented to establish the superiority of one group over another, and are used strictly for that purpose). But the same is true of such terms as 'broad', 'chick', and even 'girl' (when it is used to refer to a person who is in fact a woman).

The 'Fascist society,' then (which *Triumph of the Will* gives us a privileged opportunity to examine in detail), simply carries to their logical conclusion many of the tendencies present in the society around us. What can one set against it? Clearly, the notion of the 'liberated' society. And if we are not yet — and hopefully may not become — a Fascist society, we are even further from becoming a liberated one. ('Liberation' must never be confused with 'permissiveness', the very name of which implies authority — what is permitted can also be forbidden). Indeed, the 'liberated society' exists only as a notion, a concept, an ideal (whereas the notion of the Fascist society has already achieved various incarnations). I want first to consider in more detail what light *Triumph of the Will* throws on Fascism, before returning to this concept — which we can meanwhile define in *negative* terms, as the *abolition* of all those instances of oppression I itemized above.

How much of Nazism is actually reflected in Riefenstahl's film?

a) *The speeches*. They say remarkably little, consisting largely (like the visual 'art' of the film) of empty, inflated, vaguely inspirational rhetoric: the Nazi party is 'saving' Germany (primarily economically, but also spiritually); patriotism is encouraged (to the point of delirium/hysteria); 'racial purity' (the concept of which *Night and Fog* records the logical conclusion) is essential.

b) *Dehumanization*. The conversion of instinctual energies into mechanism: the parades, the marches, the goose-step. The film's famous 'spectacle' is the spectacle of human beings objectified, mechanized, turned into tiny cogs in a vast machine. The equally celebrated spectacle of the production numbers in Busby Berkeley musicals provides a fas-

Excellence -
Laurentian

cinating parallel/inversion: in Riefenstahl, the spectacle is male and active, in Berkeley female and passive, but there is the same emphasis on the reduction of the human to the mechanical.

c) *Maleness as power.* Berkeley gives us women objectified as spectacle for the male gaze. *Triumph of the Will* reduces women to the role of bystanders, admiring the assertion of phallic power (they are also allowed to appear, as part of the spectacle, in peasant costumes). The film insists on its phallic imagery *ad nauseum*: erect spades, erect weapons, erect flags, stiff legs thrust forward in the goose-step. Throughout this film directed by a woman at Hitler's command, the phallus is celebrated as the supreme symbol of male dominance, the power of the phallus perversely equated with the power of the machine. (For an alternative role permitted women under Nazism, see the female concentration camp guards of *Night and Fog*: monstrous figures, stereotypically de-feminized).

d) *The indoctrination of children* ('today we rule Germany, tomorrow the world'). The importance of the conscription of children (especially, of course, male children) for the glorious Nazi future is underlined repeatedly in Hitler's speeches and in Riefenstahl's imagery. We may compare the indoctrination of children within our culture (we prefer to call it 'socialization,' a word that should always be profoundly mistrusted): the transmission of the dominant ideology (patriarchy, capitalism) as unquestionable fact and truth. The form this indoctrination takes is of course much less blatant (arguably, more dishonest) than the conditioning of the German young as future Nazis: our educational system is devoted to 'teaching children to think for themselves' — within carefully regulated limits. The two great seminal figures of 20th century thought, Marx and Freud, have no place within our pre-university curricula, except perhaps as bogeymen.

e) *Cleanliness/Work.* In *Night and Fog*, the slogans inscribed over the gates of the concentration camps are not 'Abandon hope, all ye who enter here,' but 'Cleanliness is Health' and 'Work is Freedom': values insisted upon also in Riefenstahl. I shall take each in turn.

i. In relation to the camps, the implications of 'Cleanliness is Health' (a phrase our mothers might have taught us) are sinister indeed, the cleanliness in question being the purity of the Aryan blood. *Night and Fog* underlines the slo-

gan's hideous irony: what the camps produced was the ultimate filth of rotting human corpses. Cleanliness is established early as a value in Riefenstahl's film: the all-boys-together washing scene with the hoses. Subsequently, the ideal of cleanliness aligns itself logically with militarism and mechanization. Freud saw the obsession with cleanliness as a mark of sexual repression: and most of us, at some point in our lives, have encountered the notion that sex is 'dirty.' The real 'triumph of the will' is the conversion of sexual energies into the power-drive (the subject, treated tragically, of Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible*). As for an alternative image of health, one might oppose to Riefenstahl's cleanliness a character from a film made in France the same year: le Père Jules in *L'Atalante*, who lives amidst 'filth' (the continually multiplying cats) without a vestige of bourgeois squeamishness, who is totally unrepressed and triumphantly healthy.

ii. As for 'Work is Freedom,' the vacuousness of the slogan is immediately apparent when we reflect that, under Fascism as under democratic capitalism, 'work' can only be, for the great majority of the population, alienated labour: the performance of non-pleasurable activities that allow the individual no creative satisfaction, for a motive that has no direct connection with the activities themselves (whether the motive be perceived as the acquisition of money or the fulfilment of 'patriotic' duty scarcely matters). It is the necessity of alienated labour that demands the high degree of 'surplus repression' within our culture: the degree that Freud already saw as imposing increasingly intolerable burdens on the individual. One must distinguish carefully here between two Freudian concepts that are often popularly confused: 'repression' and 'sublimation.' Libido (erotic energy) can be successfully and satisfyingly 'sublimated' into pleasurable creative activity (which is why the great cultural achievements of humanity are always seen, psychoanalytically, as rooted in sexuality). Alienated labour, however, requires *repression* of libido: as the activity is by definition unpleasurable and (from any personal viewpoint) non-creative, there is no way in which its performance is accessible through sublimation. The emphasis on work in Hitler's speeches (grounded of course in the long-established 'Protestant work ethic,' with its assumption of the moral excellence of work and self-denial) again underlines the conversion of sexuality into the

power-drive: the logical slogan would be 'Work is Domination.'

f) *The popularity of Nazism.* More frightening, perhaps, than the goose-stepping Nazis are the crowds that cheer them on, the involvement in and endorsement of Fascism by 'ordinary people.' 'Who is responsible?': on one level, all those well-intentioned citizens who 'innocently' line the streets to cheer the Nazi processions, and whose 'innocent' complicity made the concentration camps possible. (Their contemporary counterparts are, arguably, the cinema crowds who cheer on Harrison Ford in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*). What is responsible is precisely this terrible innocence — the state of ignorance and mystification in which people are kept by our social institutions — politics, the media, the educational system, the family.

Other components of Nazism are not rendered explicit in Riefenstahl's film:

a) Emphasis on the family, as the means of perpetuating the race and containing sexuality, through the rigid definition of sex-roles.

b) The subordination of women within the family, their role as reproducers, their sexual fidelity to their Aryan husbands guaranteeing racial purity.

c) Strict sexual morality: sex for procreation: hence the channelling of surplus sexual energies into work/cleanliness/militarism.

d) The persecution of gays, which, throughout history, has always gone hand in hand with the oppression of women ('witches' and 'faggots' were burnt together). On the personal level, one can invariably assess from the way a man treats women what will be his attitude to gays, and *vice versa*.

In retrospect from the present, the persecution of gays — alluded to neither by the Fascist Riefenstahl in 1934 nor by the liberal Resnais in 1955 — assumes particular significance. It appears to have been as deliberate and systematic as the persecution of the Jews, except that gays — especially at that period of their history — were much harder to track down (it's remarkable that the Nazis found 300,000). Among the most important of Freud's discoveries — and one whose implications Freud himself was totally unable to follow through — was the discovery of universal bisexuality: every one of the 'case histories' Freud analysed revealed at some level repressed homosexuality; in many cases (the 'Wolf Man,' for example) it is obvious that the patient's neurosis was the outcome of the repression. If the human infant is naturally bisexual (which now seems

difficult to doubt), then it is plain that the repression of homosexual impulses is the work of culture, not nature. The motivation is obvious enough: the repression of bisexuality is necessary for the perpetuation of heterosexual male dominance, the rule of the symbolic father, which entails among other things the rigid and clear-cut definition of what is masculine and what is feminine, so that what is designated feminine can be kept in its place, as dependent and inferior. It is through the repression of bisexuality that the heterosexual male is constructed as potential Fascist. The social acceptance of bisexuality would seriously undermine the central unit of our society and the basis of its inherent Fascism, the patriarchal nuclear family. It would also be a crucial step towards resolving the current crisis in heterosexual relations, in which women continue to be oppressed while *knowing* they are oppressed. It is what the Fascist mentality supremely cannot tolerate. Hence the strength and persistence in our culture of that widespread mental illness homophobia: to the heterosexual male, his own repressed homosexuality threatens his entire social construction, hence it must be disowned within the self and vilified in others. The political complex we call Fascism is reflected, in microcosm, in the individual.

The contemporary relevance of *Triumph of the Will* and *Night and Fog* must now be plain. One cannot (except perhaps as polemical hyperbole) call Reagan's USA or Thatcher's Britain a Fascist state; one can, however, see very clearly the various components of Fascism building up all over the western world: the Moral Majority; 'revivalist' religious groups; the growing strength of overtly Fascist organizations in western nations (i.e. the KKK, Aryan Nation, National Front); the constant emphasis on the Family, and on the need to defend/preserve the traditional morality that supports it; the revival of the 'good old values'; the persecution of gays. The concentration camps may not be that far away, and the question 'Who is responsible?' could be felt to have immediate personal relevance.

To sum up succinctly: the *threat* of Fascism will only be eliminated from civilisation when two conditions have been fulfilled: the abolition of private property, and the social acknowledgement and acceptance of universal bisexuality. Those are the two prerequisites for the 'liberated society.' The 'art' of *Triumph of the Will* is built upon the total repression and negation of the possibility of such alternatives; and it is

Resnais' failure to pursue an analysis of Fascism to these conclusions that leaves *Night and Fog* nowhere to go but despair.

As western culture is pervaded — on all levels, in all its social relations — by Fascist tendencies, it is inevitable that these should be reflected throughout the mainstream cinema. The 'camera rhetoric' of *Triumph of the Will* — the concrete expression of a Fascist aesthetic — is by no means unique to that film, to Riefenstahl, or to Nazi film-making, and cannot be neatly packaged and put to one side. All the technical devices Riefenstahl employs are common currency in American and European cinema (if seldom concentrated in so rigidified, systematic and exclusive a form), and they cannot be purged of their connotations of domination and manipulation.

This may sound like the preface to one of those blanket denunciations of (a) Hollywood and (b) narrative cinema in general that have proliferated within the progressive film criticism of recent years; I intend it as exactly the reverse. While patriarchal capitalism continues (and I personally don't see it ending overnight, or within my lifetime), the Fascist potential will continue with it. I am not sure what a cinema entirely purified of Fascist connotations, Fascist impulses, would be like, but it is clear that it could exist *at present* only on the fringes (both of cinema and of society), and that — as a marginal practice, renouncing not only mainstream cinema but the entire dominant tradition of art in western culture since (at least) the Renaissance — it would be a cinema of *deprivation*. Even, for example, *Riddles of the Sphinx* seems by no means free of the desire to dominate and manipulate; it is relevant to ask whether domination and manipulation are not, to a degree, inherent in *any* notions of 'form' and 'structure.' The cinema in which I am interested is a cinema in which the basic structures and conflicts of our culture are dramatized — on both the thematic and formal levels; to dramatize something is necessarily to reproduce it. Of course, many films *merely* reproduce, and thereby reinforce. But there are also many that, in reproducing the social and psychic structures of our culture, simultaneously subject them to criticism. I shall glance briefly at the ways in which Fascist impulses are dramatized in the work of two of the great Hollywood masters, Ford and Hitchcock.

Ford's 'historical' cinema is explicitly concerned with domination: the subjugation of the Indian, the elimination of the 'lawless,' the chaining of the erotic, the subordination of women: in brief, with the multi-levelled imperialism upon which the history of America was founded. A frequent characteristic of his work is the 'ennobling' low-angle shot so common in *Triumph of the Will*, and, as in Riefenstahl, it is used to give stature to the figure of the 'charismatic' leader, and to dignify and poeticize militarism (those famous images of the cavalry against the skyline). The militarism that is a prominent (superficially, even at times the dominant) thread of the cavalry films actually echoes, thematically, certain moments in Hitler's speeches: the notion that the individual achieves meaning and worth only through the self-abnegation of service, discipline, assimilation into the military group, the patriotic mission. There is no doubt that such features answer to a powerful impulse in Ford's work. Yet no one familiar with that work will conceivably be satisfied with such a description of it. The features I have isolated never exist in isolation in the films, at the level of the sequence or the shot: they are everywhere qualified by the pervasive sense of defeat and loss, by intimations of resignation and disillusionment, by the emphasis (consistently conflicting with the notion of dignity-through-assimilation) on personal drama, personal sacrifice, personal tragedy; above all, by the continual play of paradox, the seeming commitment to America's 'manifest destiny' ironically counterpointed by an awareness of the actual destiny that becomes manifest, of the loss entailed in converting the wilderness into a garden. 'Fascist' tendencies, that is, are at once inscribed in the films (often quite explicitly, in jingoistic speech, etc.) and repudiated by them.

The case of Hitchcock is even more fascinating. His celebrated technique is explicitly dedicated to power and manipulation ('putting the audience through it,' 'giving the audience emotions'); his obsession with domination is evident at every level of the films. Their thematic is centred on power-struggles, and Hitchcock seems to see all human relations in terms of the drive to dominate. (One has only to qualify this as 'all human relations *under patriarchal capitalism*' to grasp that in this he merely pushes to its logical 'excess' the dominant tendency of our culture). At the same time, the films continuously foreground the perverse-

ness, the monstrousness, the destructiveness of the power-drive (above all, in their pervasive sense of the *impossibility* of heterosexual relations that are not perverted and sado-masochistic). Characteristically, there comes a moment in the films in which spectator identification (the mainstay of Hitchcock's domination of his audiences) is abruptly broken and everything is called into question: the moment in *Rear Window* when the audience sees what the protagonist doesn't; the 'premature' revelation in *Vertigo*; the shower-murder in *Psycho*. The Hitchcock 'villain' (Uncle Charlie in *Shadow of a Doubt*, the U-boat commander in *Lifeboat*, the dominant murderer in *Rope*, Bruno Anthony in *Strangers on a Train*) characteristically dramatizes 'fascist' tendencies, and is presented as at once fascinating, perverted, monstrous, and ultimately self-destructive, and his seductive 'potency' revealed as, at another level, impotence. So, while the domination impulse pervades Hitchcock's work at every level, the films are not Fascist films: rather, they are films in which Fascism is presented, dramatized and dismantled.

The Fascist potential of the Hollywood cinema has, on the other hand, been fairly nakedly revealed in recent years — the years of recuperation (in

both senses of the word) after Vietnam and Watergate. I want to conclude this section by considering, very briefly, the phenomenon represented by films like the *Star Wars* trilogy and the *Indiana Jones* movies: not only by the films as films, but by their 'phenomenal' popular success. In their heavily signified 'fairy-tale' innocuousness they suggest something very close to an actual Fascist popular cinema.

It has been frequently pointed out that the ending of *Star Wars* was actually modelled on *Triumph of the Will*. This was probably intended as a joke (I am certainly not accusing Lucas — or Spielberg — of complicity in some 'diabolical' and deliberate Fascist plot). When one considers the symbolic role in the film of 'the Force' — together with its audiences' widespread readiness to 'believe', albeit as a child 'believes' in Santa Claus — the joke becomes somewhat unfunny. The step from 'the Force' to Nazi mysticism (Hitler's remarks about God and the Party) seems a small one: simply to step from 'not being serious' to 'being serious,' which can be made in a second. In *Raiders*, the Force becomes nuclear power (thinly disguised as the Ark of the Covenant): as Hitler enlisted God on the side of the Nazis, so here God is enlisted

on the side of America. So long as Americans don't look, their enemies can all be destroyed while they remain safe.

Two conspicuous features of these films are particularly significant: (a) their deliberate mindlessness, and their cultivation of a mindless audience; (b) their technical 'brilliance' and supreme professionalism — a matter of keeping the audience dazzled, unable to reflect, in a state of total dependence on the next narrative twist, the next 'cut,' in which the most grotesque assumptions are passively assimilated under cover of 'innocuous' entertainment. The excessive and repulsive violence of *Raiders* — inflicted, apart from a few wounds sustained by the hero, exclusively on non-Americans — is plainly meant to be enjoyed (North American audiences, at least, actually *cheer* it).

Let us be clear: these are still not, in a strict sense, 'Fascist' films: indeed, on a superficial level, they are careful explicitly to dissociate themselves from Fascism by identifying it with the villains (Darth Vader, the actual Nazis of *Raiders*). But they represent precisely the kind of 'popular entertainment' one would expect to be produced and enjoyed ('mindlessly,' of course) within an imminently Fascist culture.



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Black Mic-Mac and Colonial Discourse

by Sheila Petty

Perceptions and reactions to Black Africans date from as far back as the 14th century,¹ it was however, during the late 18th and early 19th centuries that racist attitudes toward Blacks developed and flourished in France. These attitudes were derived from an interplay of historical, political, social, economic, aesthetic and philosophical factors — "from the soil of which the field of racist discourse was able to take roots and on the nutrients of which it has been able parasitically to thrive."² Much of the French literature³ from the

17th century onward is entrenched in racist discourse and certain French film productions have not failed to follow suit.

This essay will demonstrate that although the film *Black Mic-Mac* (Thomas Gilou, France, 1986) may on the surface level be creating a "fun" portrayal of Africans in Paris, on a deeper level the film is in fact perpetrating negative images of blackness through its grounding in racist and colonial discourse. David Goldberg employs Michel Foucault's notion of a discourse

(as described in *The Archeology of Knowledge*) to explain that a well-defined field of discourse arises out of a "discursive formation" consisting in a totality of ordered relations and correlations.⁴ Edward Said's analysis of "relations" between the Orient and the West leads him to contend that Orientalism is a "corporate institution" for "dominating, restructuring and having authority over the orient."⁵ It is not the scope of this paper to compare Africanist and colonial discourse to Orientalism. It is, however, my intention to examine how



'Femme cafre,' 18th Century French drawing, reproduced in Miller, *Blank Darkness*

"relations and correlations" are organized through the "mischief of aestheticization"⁶ which is at work in *Black Mic-mac*. The diegesis of the film-text informs the spectator that an "insalubrious" apartment building in the north slums of Paris will certainly be torn down if the African residents don't persuade the health inspector (Jacques Villert) to change his mind. Attempts to buy off the inspector fail so the residents decide to "marabouter" (cast a spell on) him. Critics have labelled the antics stemming from this decision a well-blended mixture of "exotisme réaliste" (realist exoticism) and "exotisme du comique" (comic exoticism).

One of West Africa's leading actors, Sijiri Bakaba, refused a part in the film. According to Bakaba, "everything is negative in this film . . . I refuse to play a part where the African is portrayed as an idiot, without any personality . . . I'm not surprised that *Black Mic-Mac* triggered applause from the very Africans that it ridicules from beginning to end . . . simply because this big-budget film is a commercial film."⁸

The very structure of the film informs its ideology, for almost every utterance, every representation, every element of textual structure reinforces French colonial thought. The use of "realism" for the purposes of dramatic reconstruction endeavours to conceal the very processes by which meaning is created in the film. Original cinematic content and forms are not being generated to probe African realities. Since Western

codes are not being subverted, explanatory power remains within the dominant paradigm and *real* problems are glossed over in order to portray Africans as naive, irresponsible and unnecessarily superstitious. This behaviour seemingly stems from African spiritual beliefs which are presented in the film as essentially ineffective and even criminal! The marabout summoned from Africa to resolve the tenant's problem, is tricked out of his "position" by an opportunist (Isaach de Bankole) who in turn must seek aid from a Parisian marabout so his inauthenticity is not discovered.

The marabout is an essential element of West African society. Originally, he was a pious man, sometimes a saint. Guided by divine wisdom, he observed and taught koranic principles and dogma. But the marabout also practices occult sciences, and is often solicited, not for spiritual reasons, but for his ability to perform miracles and cast spells. It is this status of character that Thomas Gilou is portraying in *Black Mic-Mac*. One senses, however, that the director is so fascinated by the hoax aspect of false piety that he is incapable of an objective perception of Islam. His depiction of marabouts remains a judgement of the Muslim faith in general, rather than a critique of the manner in which some (not all) marabouts have perverted religion in order to profit from people's credulity.

The marabout(s) in the film function to a certain extent as catalyzers of

events. The residents are incapable of solving their own problem so they resort to "divine help." Not much is accomplished on the part of the marabouts as they continually try to outsmart one another. The filmmaker is effectively pitting African against African — but then again, isn't that part of the colonial project?

The question arises, how do filmic codes work to underscore France's colonial project and to maintain a hierarchical relationship between the colonizer and the colonized? The film's opening sequences seemingly expose France's rationale for domination and assimilation: order has been disrupted and must be restored. Gerald Prince determines that the minimal narrative consists of three conjoined events whereby the first and the third are static, the second, active.⁹ Terence Turner has argued that a given status quo is disrupted by the active section of a narrative; "The story is bounded at both ends by an implicit or explicit assertion of synchronic order. The narrative itself, however, represents a complex mediation of this order, necessitated by the eruption of conflict and confusion . . . of the original synchronic order."¹⁰ But whose synchronic order has been disrupted? It appears that the Africans' lives have been turned upside down since they will soon be forced to leave their home. The film's textual structure, however, suggests that France's deep desire to be rid of the Africans is glossed over by focussing on a particular hous-



Slaves proclaiming emancipation: from Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans*

ing problem. Interestingly enough, around the time of the film's release, the French government was taking certain measures to ensure that "less desirable" foreigners whose passports were supposedly not in order, were escorted back to their respective countries.

African and European space are never given equal authority in the film. Difference is stressed in terms of dichotomies with hierarchization occurring as terms are not accorded equality. The presentation of individual action as the norm rather than the customary African social mode of collectivized action, ensures that the group is never allowed to exist as an entity. African social space is fragmented throughout the film as rapid successions of close to medium shots present the building and its inhabitants. This structure is shocking to an African audience whose expectations would dictate that since the action is rarely centred on the individual, long shots must be used to cover the social space and to narrate the story in African film.

The mise-en-scene is cleverly orchestrated to ensure that choice frame space is accorded to Whites. In fact, although Africans have been given major parts (Isaach de Bankolé as 'Cousin' and Félicité Wousassi as Anisette), they function as decor and provide a "necessary exotic flavour" to the film. Their presence serves as a framing device within the frame so that characters such as the Inspector may occupy the centre of the frame. When he and his assistants arrive to assess the African's apartment building, they are greeted by one of the elders. As the African questions the intrusion ("Qu'est-ce que c'est?"), he is noticeably absent from the frame. (Valorization of the African person and group is less important to the French than their control of the territory. Seizure of the means of production has been a major concern of the French following the 16th-century publication of Leo Africanus's *Description de l'Afrique*¹¹ in which he asserts the presence of gold at Timbuktu. Despite the low opinion of Africans, their land was considered to be rich, exploitable and necessary to the French. The spread of French domination was masked to appear beneficial to Africa. Thus, the health inspector's visit is really a civilizing mission and his report "le tout est insalubre" (everything is insalubrious) justified by French appropriation of African goods and territory. In other words, "it would be better for you if we took over." The elders ask, "Qu'est-ce que c'est insalubre?" (What is insalubrious?) The inspector's

paternalistic reply is the projection of a European desire to subjugate and to reform traditional African social structures:

"C'est démolir, raser, bulldozer
... puis après reconstruire,
moderne, propre ... C'est pour
votre bien-être."

(It means demolish, raze, bulldoze
... then afterward, rebuild, modern,
clean ... It's for your own
good.)

The social organization of production in traditional agricultural societies is closely associated with the familial organization. The colonial system's disruption of the traditional family system by separation led to an overall instability of the local system. The imposed nuclear family system stems from forced integration of traditional societies into a capitalist system. The introduction of a cash economy and wage labour was really not "for the Africans' own good," but rather, for the good of France. The reply does not answer the question, but it is not meant to. It demonstrates the order of relations between the French and Africans.

By resorting to pidgin French, the inspector is informing the Africans that they are less French, less white and subsequently less human than he is. Mastery of the French language affords the Inspector great power — power to believe as did the Abbé Demanet in the 18th century that, "The African appears to be a machine, wound and unwound by springs, similar to soft wax, which can be made to take on any figure one wishes ...; eager to be instructed, he fervently grabs onto whatever is given him ...; he has nothing to hold him in place."¹² Levels of mastery of the French language create hierarchy amongst the Africans and afford various levels of power in the film. It's Cousin's knowledge of French that allows him to trick the real marabout and most of the buildings' residents.

Insalubrious can refer to climate or place. Although the inspector is *saying* the building is unhealthy, he really *means* that the "climate" or atmosphere of the community is unacceptable. The inspector's comments embrace climatic theories of the 18th century which upheld the belief that humans were more reasonable in temperate zones. In *De l'Esprit des lois*, Montesquieu asserts that "You will find in the climates of the north peoples with few vices, many virtues, sincerity and truthfulness. Approach the south, you will think you are leaving morality itself, the passions

become more vivacious and multiply crimes ... The heat can be so excessive that the body is totally without force. The resignation passes to the spirit and leads people to be without curiosity, nor desire for noble enterprise."¹³ If the Africans continue to dwell in an unhealthy climate/building, they will resort to crime and to not so noble enterprise. In short, the result would be perversion and "mic-mac." This is how the inspector perceives the Africans' efforts to preserve their home — "C'est du mic-mac," (It's a shady business). But while the inspector is condemning African behaviour as mic-mac, he is engaged in the process of demolishing a culture and rebuilding it to suit his own desire. Black mic-mac is confronting white mic-mac.

This raises the question of the relationship between colours and meanings. The colour black seems to have consistently been assigned negative values in Western cultures. For instance, in Greek black connotes dirt, depravity and sinister intent.¹⁴ In 17th century French literature, blackness and negativity were dealt with extensively. Molière's *Tartuffe* speaks of "black spirit or mind."¹⁵ Europeans found the colour black aesthetically unappealing and therefore associated Africans' blackness with an inner depravity. This view was rooted in physiognomics, a doctrine which flourished at the end of the 18th century and which seems to have rooted itself in the colonial discourse of *Black Mic-mac*. After the inspector becomes romantically involved with the young Congolese hairdresser Anisette, we witness his first visit to her salon. Before he arrives she explains to another client that "on ne peut pas être noir et sensible à la tête" which literally means "you can't be black and have a sensitive head." Anisette is expressing the age-old view that the body is an externalization of the soul, the indication of a person's moral worth. Added to this is Romanticism's polygenist argument that different races descended from different species. In 1866 the Larousse dictionary declared the Black and White races to form different species.¹⁷ "Anthropologists" of the time went to great lengths to prove that Blacks and Whites could not mate successfully. Phrenological thought became popular in the 19th century as scientists focused on individual differences as a function of brain structure. The physician J.J. Virey described the differences between Blacks and Whites as "among us the forehead is pushed forward, the mouth is pulled back as if

we were destined to think rather than to eat; the Negro has a shortened forehead and a mouth that is pushed forward as if he were made to eat instead of to think."¹⁸

Black Mic-Mac depicts eating as a primary African occupation without taking into consideration differences of culture and what the partaking of food means to each of these cultures. In Africa, meals are subject to particular rules, both in the preparation and in the consummation. During the sanitary inspection of the residents' building, one of the Inspector's assistants is offered a plate of food from which he immediately falls ill. The filmmaker abuses this African traditional custom of hospitality dictating that anyone who arrives during mealtime is offered something to eat. Instead, the film suggests that the food, which we aren't really allowed to see, is unclean because it is "other." Further into the diegesis, an inspection of the "Chez Mère Aida" restaurant reveals a roast monkey in the refrigerator. Oddly enough, the film's release date coincides with a campaign launched in the occidental scientific milieu and hyped by the press, asserting that the AIDS virus originated in Black African monkeys. Is this a simple coincidence, or is it a calculated effort on the part of the filmmaker to discredit Black Africans?

Anisette's statement not only stresses racial difference through language but it also equates colour and body structure to levels of intelligence — "on ne peut pas être noir et sensible à la tête" — (You can't be Black and capable of sensation and perception.) If you are Black, you are neither sensitive to touch nor able to think. Anisette's utterance is strikingly similar to the play on words discussed by Christopher Miller in *Blank Darkness*. He suggests that if black is defined in French as "ne réfléchit pas"¹⁹ (does not reflect), two possible meanings arise from the sentence "le noir ne réfléchit pas": (Black does not reflect) and (The Black Man does not think). Miller also contends that it is through plays on words that Western authors have created elaborate descriptions of humanity.²⁰ These descriptions of course, assert the superiority of one race over another. While Anisette's utterances work to posit her inferiority vis-à-vis her white lover, and by extension her lower position in the "hierarchy of races," the camera works to remind the spectator that not only is Anisette African, but she is also a woman. During a dance sequence, a series of close-up shots of Anisette's undu-

lating hips attracts the Inspector's attention. As he watches her, her "cousin" exclaims, "Regarde la courbure de ses hanches!" (Look at those curves!) This comment momentarily directs attention away from "woman as ornament" to "woman as producer of producers." But it is not just the woman's hips that are valued in African societies; her whole body constitutes a sacred vessel carrying life and strength. By refusing to consider Anisette's body in its totality, the filmmaker is rejecting her as a whole person and is resorting somewhat to the clichéd practice of fragmenting woman's body for male pleasure.

Anisette seems to have realized that in order to gain rights from the colonizer (Inspector), she must reject her own culture/civilization/climate and adopt French modes of thinking. This brings to mind Albert Memmi's portrait of the colonized where refusal of self and love of other are necessary conditions for assimilation.²¹ But while this refusal of self/love of other is exactly what the Inspector is requiring of the residents of the "insalubrious" building, it is also what Anisette, who has reached a more advanced stage of colonization than the residents, is desiring of the Inspector. She will never attain her goal however, for to do so would mean her becoming as the Inspector, enjoying the same privileges and power, etc. Colonial relations would therefore cease to exist. This is what seemingly occurs in the final sequence of the film as Anisette, her 'cousin' and the Inspector drive off together into the Parisian landscape. Rather than destroying the colonial project so carefully laid out in the filmic discourse, this scene is in fact supporting it. The construction and maintaining of the relationship with Anisette and her 'cousin' is a hierarchal decision on the part of the Inspector affirming his superiority over them (he is "seizing" them in Fanonian language) just as the destruction of African culture affirmed the Inspector's superiority over the African residents. Formal closure occurs in the form of a classical "happy end." The building is miraculously saved at the last minute. But the signed papers necessary for blocking the destruction of the building are, in fact, worthless. The Inspector knows he can have all the Africans expelled at any moment by means of a passport control. Order therefore, is only restored to the Inspector's French world.

Hierarchy rather than polar opposition between Black and White is characteristic of the filmic discourse of *Black Mic-Mac*. The fact that White has

"mated" with Black means that Black is altered by intercourse with whiteness but Black can never totally annihilate nor assume White.

This does not pretend to be a complete reading of *Black Mic-Mac*. What I have attempted to demonstrate is that colonial discourse is alive and well in late 20th century art.

Endnotes

1. According to the theory of French priority, Guinea was first discovered by French-Norman sailors either in 1364 under Jehan de Roanais or in 1402 under Jean de Bethencourt. Most French historians would agree, however, that it was the Portuguese who first reached Black Africa by sea.
2. David Goldberg "Raking the Field of the Discourse of Racism," *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 1, September 1987, pp. 67-68.
3. See Christopher Miller's analysis of Africanist discourse in the works of Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Sade and Celine in *Blank Darkness: Africanist Discourse in French*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985.
4. Goldberg, p. 60.
5. Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Pantheon, 1978.
6. In "We Don't Need Another Hero: Anti-Theses on Aesthetics," *Black Frames: Critical Perspectives on Black Independent Cinema*, Cambridge, London, MIT Press, 1988. Clyde Taylor argues that aesthetics (ie. Western aesthetics) was "concocted" as far back as the 18th century in order to maintain Western dominant ideology.
7. *Cahiers du Cinema*, #385, June 1986.
8. *Sidwaya*, No. 704, February 4, 1987, p. 6.
9. Gerald Prince, *A Grammar of Stones*, The Hague, Mouton, 1973.
10. Terence Turner, "Oedipus: Time and Structure in Narrative Form," *Forms of Symbolic Action*, Proceedings of the 1969 Annual Spring meeting of the American Ethnological Society.
11. See Leo Africanus, *Descriptions de l'Afrique*, Trans. A. Epaulard, Paris: Librairie d'Amerique et d'Orient.
12. Abbe Demanet, *Nouvelle Histoire de l'Afrique Francoise*, Paris: 1767, p. 1.
13. Montesquieu, *De l'Esprit des lois* II, p. 562.
14. William Cohen, *The French Encounter with Africans*, Bloomington & London: Indiana University Press, 1980.
15. Moliere, *Tartuffe*, Paris: Larousse, 1971 edition, p. 86.
16. J.W. Goethe, *Theory of Colours*, Trans. Charles Locke Eastlake, London, 1840, p. 265.
17. Pierre Larousse, "Negre" *Grand Dictionnaire Universel*, Paris, 1866, pp. 903-904.
18. J.J. Virey, *Histoire naturelle du genre humain* II, Paris, 1801, p. 41.
19. The *Petit Robert* defines "noir" as "reflecting no visible radiation."
20. Miller, p. 31.
21. Albert Memmi, *Portrait du Colonisé*, Paris: Payot, 1973.

Third

Cinema

Festival



The Third Cinema Festival has introduced Southern Ontario to films and videos from the third world. It is dedicated to the ideal of the moving image as an expression of the individual cultures of the developing nations.

In November, 1987, as part of the Third Cinema Festival (second edition) held in Waterloo, London, North York and Toronto, a series of papers were read at the University of Western Ontario. Most of them were collected under the heading "Third Cinema Theory and Documentary," though Manthia Diawara also read on the tradition of the story teller in African cinema, and Bob Stam presented the Brazilian film, *Macunaima* (Joachim Pedro de Andrade, 1969) in its cultural and political contexts.

One of the two panels was entitled "Documentary/Ethnographic film, A Third World Perspective," and was co-sponsored by the Centre for Social and Humanistic Studies at UWO. The keynote speaker was Trinh T. Minh-ha, who presented a complement to her film, *Reassemblage* (1985): a decon-

structive reading of ethnographic film illustrated with slides. Unfortunately, her presentation has been reproduced elsewhere, but she has kindly sent us a new essay, which ideally fits the framework of the current issue of *CineAction!*. The other papers on the panel were read by Chris Sonik, a lecturer in ethnographic film at UWO and London filmmaker.

The second panel, as well as Stam's presentation were co-sponsored by Western's Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism, under the direction of Martin Krieswirth. I introduced the topic "The importance of the documentary film form to Third Cinema Theory" and Wendy Rolph also read a paper on the Latin American context. What appears here is a short article which combines my paper and an introductory piece in the festival catalogue, co-authored by Joao Luis Vieira. Films for the London component of Third Cinema Festival (1987) were programmed by Tim Barnard, while videos were programmed by Marilyn Burgess. I was the London co-ordinator. The Founder/Executive Director of Third Cinema festival is Renate Wickens.

Peter Rist

Black Bamboo

by Trinh T. Minh-ha

Every spectator mediates a text to his or her own reality. To repeat such a banality is to remember that although everyone *knows* this, everytime an interpretation of a work implicitly presents itself as a mere (obvious or objective) decoding of the producer's message, there is an explicit reiteration of the fetishistic language of the spectacle, in other words, a blind denial of the mediating subjectivity of the spectator as reading subject and meaning maker-contributor. The same applies to producers who consider their works to be transparent descriptions or immediate experiences of Reality "as it is" ("This is the reality of the poor people"; "the reality of the nine-to-five working class is that they have no time to think about 'issues' in their lives"). Literal translations are particularly fond of "evident truths," and the more they take themselves for granted, the more readily they mouth truisms and view themselves as *the* ones and the only *right* ones. The self-permitting voice of authority is common in interpretation, yet every decoding implies choice and is interpellated by ideology, whether spoken or not.

Reading as a creative responsibility is crucial to every attempt at thwarting what has come to be known in the society of the Spectacle as "the humanism of commodity." Although important in any enterprise, it is pivotal in works that break off the habit of the Spectacle by asking questions aloud; by addressing the reality of representations and entering explicitly into dialogue

with the viewer/reader. What is offered, in other words is a spectacle that shows neither spectacular beings nor sensational actions; offers neither a personal nor a professional point of view; provides no encased knowledge to the acquisitive mind; and has no single story to tell nor any central message to spread, except the unconcealed one(s) *about the spectators themselves* as related to each specific context. The interpreters' conventional role is challenged since their function is not to tell "what the work is all about," but to complete and "co-produce" it by addressing their own language and representational subjectivity.

The inability to think symbolically or to apprehend language in its very symbolic nature is commonly validated as an attribute of "realistic," clear and accomplished thinking. The cards are readily shifted so as to turn a limit, if not an impoverishment of dominant thinking into a virtue, a legitimate stance in mass communication, therefore a tool for political demagoguery to appeal to widely naturalized prejudices. Since clarity is always ideological, and reality, always adaptive, such a demand for clear communication often proves to be nothing else but an intolerance for any language other than the one approved by the dominant ideology. At times obscured and other times blatant, this inability and unwillingness to deal with the unfamiliar, or with a language different from one's own, is in fact, a trait that intimately belongs to the man of coercive power. It is a reputable form of colonial discrimination, one in which difference can only be admitted once it is appropriated, that is, when it operates within the Master's sphere of having.

Yesterday's anti-colonialists are trying to humanize today's generalized colonialism. They become its watchdogs in the cleverest way: by barking at all the after-effects of past inhumanity.

(Raoul Vaneigem)¹

Among the many realms of occupied territories, one of particular relevance to the problems of reading here is the concept of the "political." Although much has already been said and done concerning the "apolitical" character of the narrow "political," it is still interesting to observe the endlessly varying ways the boundaries of "the political" are being obsessively guarded and reassigned to the exclusive realm of politics-by-politicians. Thus, despite the effectiveness and persistence of the women's movement in deconstructing the opposition between nature (female) and culture (male) or between private (personal) and the public (political); despite the growing visibility of numerous Third-Worldist activities in de-commodifying ethnicity, displacing thereby all divisions of Self and Other or of margin and center based on geographical arbitrations and racial essences; despite all these attacks on pre-defined territories, a "political" work continues unvaryingly for many to be one which opposes (hence remains particularly dependent upon) institutions and personalities from the body politic, and mechanically "barks at all the after-effects of past inhumanity" — in other words, which safely counteracts within the limits of pre-formulated, codified forms of resistance.

Particularly intriguing here are the kinds of questions and expectations repeatedly voiced whenever films made on and by members of the Third World are concerned. Generally speaking, there is an excessive tendency to focus on economic matters in "underdeveloped" or "developing" contexts among members of overdeveloping nations. It is as if, by some tacit consent, "Third World" can/must only be defined in terms of hierarchical economic development in relation to "First World" achievements in this domain. And, it is as if the presence and the sight of imported Western products being "mis-used" in non-Western contexts remain



highly compelling and recomforting to the Western viewer on imaginary foreign land. The incorporation (if not emphasis) of recognizable signs of Westernization even in the most remote parts of Third World countryside is binding; for, exoticism can only be consumed when it is salvaged, that is reappropriated and translated into the Master's language of authenticity and otherness. A difference that *defies while not defying* is not exotic, it is not even recognized as difference, it is simply no language to the dominant's ear (only sheer charlatanism). Any film that fails to display these signs of "planned poverty" in its images and to adopt the *diagnostic* language of economic-deterministic rationale, is immediately classified as "apolitical." The devices set up by the Master's liberals to correct his own mistakes thus become naturalized rules, and no matter what the context is, these rules exercise their universal power.

The political is hereby not this "permanent task inherent in all social existence" which, as Michel Foucault suggests, "cannot be reduced to the study of a series of institutions, not even to the study of all those institutions which would merit the name 'political,' but pertains to 'the analysis, elaboration, and bringing into question of power relations and the 'agonism' between power relations and the intransitivity of freedom."² *The political becomes compulsively instead "the legislative, institutional, executive mirror of the social."*³ In this exclusive realm of politics by politicians, the political is systematically depoliticized. The more "self-evident" the location of politics, the easier it is to claim knowledge, to gain control and to acquire territory. The progressive "First World" thus takes as much pride in its "Third World" underdeveloped as the church used to take pride in its poor. (As it has been astutely pointed out, the humanitarianism advocated through all the "feed the poor" images of Africa and the "do good" messages of the television missionaries may ease the consciences of the rich, but what they hide are precisely the ties between world hunger and imperialism.⁴) Not only all films related to the Third World must show the people's poverty, but whatever they put forth in their critical stance vis-a-vis oppression should not depart from the Master's image of progress, for it is only in terms of progress — more particularly acquisitive, quantified progress — that he conceives of "revolution" and transformation.

A woman viewer: — In dealing with socialist Vietnam, why don't you show what has been acquired through the Revolution? The woman filmmaker — The women in the film wouldn't have spoken as they did without the Revolution. The viewer: — . . . True, but I mean real acquisitions, real attainments . . . something tangible! Do you understand me?

Poverty and class. Even the notion of class is commodified. Again, it is almost exclusively in the context of films on and by people of color that middle class viewers become suddenly over(t)ly concerned with the question of class — more as a classifying term however, than as a way of rethinking production relations. Class, which is reduced to a fixed and categorized meaning in its common use among the viewers mentioned, has apparently never been their preoccupation in contexts other than the one that concern "their" poor. (For, they do not seem to have any qualms going to the movies whose dominating attractions are the love stories of the Western petty bourgeoisie, nor are they disturbed every time they switch their television set on, whose visual symbols and chatter are governed by the myths of the upwardly mobile and the tastes of the very affluent.) *(The) attachment to the new insures that television will be a vaguely leftist medium, no matter who its personnel might be. Insofar as it debunks traditions and institutions . . . television serves the purposes of that larger movement within which left and right (in America, at least) are rather like the two legs of locomotion: the movement of modernization . . . Television is a parade of experts instructing the unenlightened about the weather, aspirins, toothpastes, the latest books or proposals for social reform, and the correct attitudes to have with respect to race, poverty, social conflict, and new moralities (Michael Novak).*⁵

The mandatory concern for class in the exclusive context of films on and by Third World members is in itself a class issue. The complexity of the problem often goes unnoticed as the class bias many of us project onto others is often masked by the apparent righteousness of these "correct attitudes" popularized in relation to race and poverty. The tendency to identify Third World with mere economic poverty is always lurking below questions such as: "The film is beautiful. But some people look as if they have starched their clothes [sic] for the camera. Why

do they dress so well?" (concerning a documentary shot in villages of Senegal); or else: "I am surprised to see how beautiful the women are. Here [in the U.S.], they would have been fashion models. You have obviously selected them!" Such tendency is further recognizable in the way the difference in dress codes is often ignored. While among progressive middle-class women it is important to signal publicly, through the very casual way one dresses, that one is downwardly mobile, the situation is rather reversed in the working class. "Most black women don't dress like this [in slacks and shirt]" observes Julia Lesage, "nor do most trade union women, if they are gathering in public for a meeting. Many, if not most, women in the U.S. cherish a notion of dressing up in public or dressing up out of respect for other people . . . [Blacks] do not have a legacy of pride in dressing down."⁶ Nor do most Asians in the U.S. or elsewhere (including in post-Mao China); especially when it is question of appearing on camera for the thousands of (respected) others, and of "saving face" for one's own family and community. (Thus, in a film where both Asian middle-class and working-class women are featured, a woman viewer remarks: "All the women in the film are middle class. Can you talk about this?" The woman filmmaker: "Oh! . . . How do you see them all as middle class?" The viewer: "Aren't they?! . . . the way they dress! . . .") Whose middle class is it finally? In refusing to situate its own legacy in dress codes, hence to acknowledge the problem of class in dealing with class, middle-class spectatorship believes it can simply evacuate class content from its safe observer's post by reiterating the objectifying Look — the Spectacle's totalitarian monologue.

So gay a colour . . . in mourning. Not too long ago (1986), in an issue of the weekly *Figaro-Magazine*, one reads in large bold letters, the following title of a feature article by a famed French reporter who is said to have spent twenty years covering the war in Vietnam: "*Mon Vietnam d'aujourd'hui, c'est la désolation*" ("My Vietnam Today Is a Desolation"). Vietnam: a sacred territory and an ideal subject for generalized colonialism. A widely unknown people, but an exceptionally famed name; all the more unforgettable as every attempt at appropriating it through the re-justification of motives and goals of the war only succeeds in setting into relief the political vacuum of a system, whose desperate desire to re-deploy its power and to correct its world

image in a situation of bitter "defeat", unfolds itself through the supremacy of war as mass spectacle. Every spectator owns a Vietnam of his or her own. If France only remembers its ex-colony to expatiate forever on it being the model of a successful revolutionary struggle against the largest world power, America is particularly eager to recall its predecessor's defeat at Dien Bien Phu and Vietnam's ensuing independence from French colonialism, whose desperate effort to cling to their Asian possession had led to the American involvement in the war. It is by denouncing past colonialism that today's generalized colonialism presents itself as more humane. North and South Vietnam are alternately attributed the role of the Good and the Bad according to the time, to suit the ideological whims of the two foreign powers. And the later carefully take turns in siding with the "winner," for it is always historically more uplifting to endorse the "enemy" who wins than the "friend" who loses.

Yes, we defeated the United States. But now we are plagued by problems. We do not have enough to eat. We are a poor, underdeveloped nation . . . Waging a war is simple, but running a country is very difficult (Pham Van Dong). For general Western spectatorship, Vietnam does not exist outside of the war. And she no longer exists since the war has ended, except as a name, an exemplary model of revolution, or a cult object for those who, while admiring unconditionally the revolution, do not seem to take any genuine, sustained interest in the troubled reality of Vietnam in her social and cultural autonomy. The more Vietnam is mystified, the more invisible she becomes. The longer Vietnam is extolled as the unequal model of the struggle against Imperialism, the more convenient it is for the rest of the world to close their eyes on the harrowing difficulties the nation, governed by a large post-revolutionary bureaucracy, continues to face in trying to cope with the challenge of recovery. (Even when the possessive pronoun "my" is liberalistically bracketed.) Whose Vietnam is the Vietnam depicted in Hollywood films as well as in the daily news and television series that offer "fresh action from Vietnam into our living rooms each evening" (Time-Life Books brochure on *Vietnam: A Television History*) and claim to deliver "the entire story of what really happened in Vietnam" in a few hours for VCR owners? Whose Vietnam is the one presented in *The Vietnam Experience* book series, "the definitive work on the Vietnam conflict . . . the



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whole explosive story . . . the whole astonishing truth . . . More colorful than any novel, more comprehensive than any encyclopedia?" Whose conflict triumphantly features in "The TV War?" Whose experience finally does Time-Life Books posters herald in its large, bold title-letters as being exclusively that of: "The Men, The Weapons, The Battles?"

Contrary to what has been affirmed by certain Vietnam experts, America's concept of its own "exceptionalism," which is said to have nurtured the roots of American intervention in the war, did

not die on the shores of Vietnam. It is still well and alive even in its most negative aspects. Vietnam as spectacle remains passionately an owned territory. Presented through the mediation of the dominant world forces, she only exists within the latter's binarism; hence the inability to conceive of her outside (or rather, in the gaps and fissures, in the to-and-fro movement across the boundaries of) the pro-communist/anti-communist opposition. Every effort at challenging such reductive paternal bilaterism and at producing a different viewing of Vietnam is immediately

recuperated within the limit of the totalized discourse of red is red and white is white. (After all *non-alignment* remains, in its larger sense, fundamental to the concept of Third World, even when some form of alignment is adopted by necessity.) Not every Vietnam anti-war demonstration effort was based on an advocacy of socialism, or on an elaborate questioning (instead of a mere moral condemning) of imperialism. Nor was it based on an extensive interrogation of the territorial and numerical principle of the war machine whereby the earth becomes an object. It is interesting to note the extent to which common reactions presented as oppositions to the government's stance often involuntarily meet the latter's ultimate objective in its foreign interventions, which is that of defending and promoting a specific lifestyle — the world of reification. Thus, despite the anti-war denotation of such comment as: "It seems like we're always getting pulled in by other people's problems. We've got enough problems of our own to deal with," what is also connoted is a certain myopic view of America's "goodwill," which reduces the rest of the world to "beggars" whose misery does not con-

cern us, because *We have our own beggars here at home.*

While in Vietnam, Party officials readily acknowledge the severity of their economic crisis and even feel the urge recently to publicly declare that "only when we no longer refuse, out of fear, to admit our own failures and oversights, only when we can squarely face the truth, even if it is sad, only then can we learn how to win" (Secretary General Nguyen Van Linh, October 1988); while in Vietnam, women reject the heroic-fighter image the world retains of them, and vocally condemn the notion of heroism as being monstrously inhuman,⁸ numerous foreign sympathizers continue to hold fast to the image of an exemplary model of revolutionary society and to deny the multifaceted problems the regime has been facing. Thus, all reflections on socialist Vietnam which do not abide by a certain socialist orthodoxy, positively embrace the system, and postulate the validity of its social organization, are crudely distorted as they are forced into the mould of hegemonic worldview and its lifelong infatuation with binary classifications: pro-communist/anti-communist, left/right, good/bad, victory/failure. *I am*

not a Marxist!" exclaimed Marx in despair of his disciples.⁹ In fact, it is imperative that socialist Vietnam remains "pure" and that it continues to be unconditionally praised, for, through past denunciations of "America's most controversial war," America can still prove that it is not entirely wrong, that "the Vietnam failure" should be attributed to a guilty government but not to "the American people." The West's friendliness and benevolence towards its Others often consists of granting itself the omnipotent rights to counteract its government and to choose, as circumstances dictate, when to endorse or when to detach itself from its institutions, while members from the Third World are required to stand by their kinsmen — government and people alike — and urged to show the official seal of approval "back home" wherever they go, in whatever enterprise they undertake . . .

The Commodity contemplates itself in a world it has created. And this world it has created is *boldly* that of "The Men, The Weapons, The Battles." To say that the spectacle is always all-male and that it aspires to genderless-



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ness is to indulge again and again in redundancy. But repetition is at times necessary, for it has a function to fulfill, especially when it does not present itself as the mechanical recurrence of sameness, but rather, as the persistence of sameness in difference. If in Dogon rituals, men also "have their periods" and their days of "impurity," no such reversal seems to be tolerated in a male-centered context where the concept of gender is irremediably reduced to a question of sexual difference or of universal sex opposition. And since in such opposition, priority is always given to literal reading and to the validation of "evidence" (essences) rather than to the interrogation of representation, the tools of (gender) production are bound to remain the Master's (invisible) tools. [Thus, reacting to a film in which women's sufferings have been commented upon by numerous women-viewers as being "very intense and depressive," a male viewer blurted out, after having uneasily tried to put forth a lengthy weasel-worded question he has embarked upon: "... The subject of the film is so partial ... Don't you think it overshadows the rest of the issues? ... I mean, how can one make a film on Vietnam, where there is so much sufferings [sic.] and focus on women?" A number of women in the audience express their approval, others hiss.] While the male-is-norm world continues to be taken for granted as the objective, comprehensive societal world, the world of woman subjects(ivities) can only be viewed in terms of partiality, individuality, and incompleteness. The tendency is to obscure the issue of women's oppression or of women's autonomy in a relation of mutual exclusiveness rather than interdependency. The impetus of the positivist project is first and foremost to supply answers, hence the need to level out all forms of oppression into one. *Not only has the question of women's liberation traditionally been bypassed by revolutionary organizations in the Third World (as it has in the West), but (again this applies to groups in the West) it has also become a target for hostility from the Left ...* (Miranda Davies)⁹

In the society of the male-centered spectacle, gender will always be denied, even and especially when the spectacle exalts feminism (heroic workers who are also good mothers and good wives). For, what the humanism of commodity markets is not two, three, but one, only One feminism. One package at a time in a policy of mutual exclusion. *To deny gender, first of all, is to deny the social relations of gender that constitute and*

validate the sexual oppression of women; and second, to deny gender is to remain "in ideology," an ideology which ... is manifestly self-serving to the male-gendered subject. (Teresa de Lauretis)¹¹ "Impurity" is the interval in which the impure subject is feared and alienated. It is the state in which the issue of gender prevails, for if red defies all literal, male-centered elucidation, it is because it intimately belongs to women's domain, in other words, to women's struggles. Women are "impure" because their red necessarily exceeds totalized discourses. In a society where they remain constantly at odds on occupied territories, women can only situate their social spaces precariously in the interstices of diverse systems of ownership. Their elsewhere is never a pure elsewhere, but only a no-escape-elsewhere, an elsewhere-within-here that enters in at the same time as it breaks with the circle of omnispectatorship, in which women always incur the risk of remaining endlessly a spectator, whether to an object, an event, an attribute, a duty, an adherence, a classification or a social process. The challenge of modifying frontiers is also that of producing an autonomous, shifting difference in which the only constant is the emphasis on the irresistible to-and-fro movement across (sexual and political) boundaries: margins and centers, red and white. It has often been noted that in Chinese ink painting, there is a "lack of interest in natural colour." One day, someone asked a painter why he painted his bamboos in red. When the painter replied "What colour should they be?", the answer came, "Black, of course."

Notes

1. Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, trans. D. Nicholson-Smith (London: Left Bank Books & Rebel Press, 1983) 23.
2. Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, ed. B. Wallis (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art and MIT Press, 1984), 429-30.
3. Jean Baudrillard, *In The Shadow of The Silent Majority*, (New York: Semiotext(e), 1981), 18.
4. See Julia Lesage, "Why Christian Television Is Good TV," *The Independent*, May 1987, 18.
5. Michael Novak, "Television Shapes the Soul," in *Television: The Critical View*, ed. H. Newcomb (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 343/346.
6. Julia Lesage, "Christian Television," 15.
7. Quoted in Stanley Karnow, *Vietnam: A History* (New York: Penguin, 1983), 27-28.
8. See interviews with Thu Van and Anh in Mai Thu Van, *Vietnam, un peuple, des voix* (Paris: Editions Pierre Horay, 1982).

9. Quoted in *Marxism and Art* ed. Maynard Solomon (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979), 12.
10. Miranda Davies, ed. *Third World Second Sex: Women's Struggles and National Liberation* (London: Zed, 1983), iv.
11. Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 15.

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The Documentary Impulse and Third Cinema Theory in Latin America: an Introduction

by Peter Rist

The term "Third Cinema" was coined by the Argentinian filmmakers, Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino in an important theoretical article, "Towards a Third Cinema" written in October 1969. In working towards an ideal they define "First Cinema" as commercial, Hollywood-type "spectacle," aimed at a "digesting object"—the spectator as consumer—wherein the films produced view "man" as "consumer of ideology, and not as the creator of ideology."¹ For Solanas and Getino, the first viable alternative, "Second Cinema" is European art cinema, or films d'auteurs, which they consider to be preferable to the Hollywood entertainment model. Here, the filmmaker is "free to express himself in non-standard language inasmuch as it is an attempt at cultural decolonization."² But the writers claim that there is a tendency for such auteurs to be, in Godard's words, "trapped inside the fortress" of the commercial "System" even in national industries which "search" for audiences as small as 200,000 (in the case of their own Argentina).³ Their second and ideal alternative is "Third Cinema." Clearly, Solanas/Getino's decision to divide cinema into three groups intentionally invokes a strong parallel between the 3rd World and Third Cinema. However, Solanas and Getino wanted the reader to associate third cinema not just with the 3rd World geographically but also to the struggle for self determination and emerging

nationhood. Thus, perhaps more importantly, "Third Cinema" should suggest a third role, a new alternative. Further, for the writers, a model "Third Cinema" would not only provide an alternative to the "System" but would also radically counteract it. Their revolutionary call was for a new alternative cinema to oppose,

a cinema of characters with one of themes, that of individuals with that of masses, that of the author with that of the operative group, one of escape with one that recaptures the truth, that of passivity with one of aggressions. To an institutionalized cinema, he [the maker of third cinema] counterposes a guerilla cinema; to movies as shows, he opposes a film act or action; to a cinema of destruction, one that is both destructive and constructive; to a cinema made for the old kind of human being, for them, he opposes a cinema fit for a new kind of human being, for what each one of us has the possibility of becoming.⁴

Solanas and Getino's article complemented their film *La hora de los hornos* (*The Hour of the Furnaces*, 1968) which stands as a remarkable example of an avant-garde film made and shown clandestinely by people whose very lives were in danger. Their idea was that the film should never be completed, but be in process, wherein the possibility of changing the film would remain open through screenings/discussions with the people of Argentina. In short, *The Hour of the Furnaces* is the key work of "Third Cinema," but it certainly wasn't the first.

In the mid-1950s, traces of the third cinema alternative could be found in the work of Brazilian Cinema Novo pioneer, Nelson Pereira dos Santos (eg., *Rio 40 degrees*, 1955) and the Argentinian Documental School of Santa Fe, particularly in Fernando Birri's *Tire Die* (1958). With these films a committed 3rd World Cinema began in Latin America, as a manifestation of the cultural needs to represent the reality of the continent. With the explosion of Brazilian Cinema Novo in the early 1960s, the appearance of the recently created Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry — ICAIC, 1959 — producing films for an authentic post-revolutionary period, and later the emergence of national cinemas in Africa (especially the Senegalese) and Asia, a series of similar thematic and aesthetic concerns began to be shared by filmmakers throughout the 3rd World. More than anything else they envisioned a cinema that would be



The Hour of the Furnaces



able to represent, inform, analyze and, even radically change the specific, real conditions of their countries. Thus, many filmmakers were effectively answering Solanas/Getino's call to use cinema as (1) a tool for consciousness raising, (2) an instrument for research and social analysis, and (3) as a catalyst to political action and social transformation, exemplified in *The Hour of the Furnaces*.⁵

Solanas and Getino found in a new documentary form the ways through which the three aims (above) could be most efficiently achieved. In Solanas/Getino's film practice, we find the roots of a militant revolutionary cinema, which would be echoed in the practice of two French filmmakers (Godard and Gorin), but also directly owing a debt to a former practitioner of revolutionary documentary, Dziga Vertov. The links

among all these filmmaker/theorists (which make us understand Solanas/Getino's position better) can be found in their transformation of the concept of a "metalinguistic cinema" into the notion of a cinema which incorporates in itself a discourse on its social and material conditions of production. Indeed, *The Hour of the Furnaces* cannot be dissociated from the historical conditions which permitted its appearance in 1968: a year when, perhaps more than any other before or since, Third World people (as well as Parisians in May) dreamed of revolution.

In their theoretical article, Solanas and Getino also argue against perfection in art, stating that "our time is one of hypothesis rather than thesis, a time of works in process — unfinished, unordered, violent works made with a camera in one hand and a rock in the

other."⁶ Roughness and documentary truth were clearly being preferred to harmonic unity and fiction. Glauber Rocha, the great practitioner of Cinema Novo, also championed youthful imperfection in "An Esthetic of Hunger," paving the way for the deliberately anarchistic "garbage cinema" of the underground movement parallel to the final phase of Cinema Novo — Udi-grudi.⁷ Julio Garcia Espinosa, while working as a Vice president of ICAIC in December 1969, picked up on the metaphor of "imperfection" and wrote "For an Imperfect Cinema" which calls for a new folk art in cinema which "will be first and foremost a 'committed' poetic."⁸ Like Solanas and Getino, Espinosa argues forcefully for a rejection of European models and, following Rocha states that "We have more faith in the sick man than the healthy, because his truth is purged in suffering . . . The imperfect cinema finds a new audience in those who struggle. It is in their problems that it finds its thematic."⁹ Rather than propose a new style, Espinosa focused on subject matter, demanding that the process rather than the results be revealed, following the "metalinguistic" approach. Indirectly, he was criticizing earlier Cuban films which owe a lot to Italian Neo-Realism and the nouvelle vague — movements which were informed by a realist immediacy lacking in earlier forms, eg., the "white telephone" films of fascist Italy and the "tradition of quality" in France — although the pervasive presence of documentary at ICAIC was not being challenged per se.

Documentary has always been important in post-revolutionary Cuba. The first films made under ICAIC were (Santiago Alvarez) newsreels and the founding director of the Cuban film institute, Alfredo Guevara said in a 1971 interview that "all the movement of Cuban cinema is formed basically around the documentary."¹⁰ Indeed, the "documentary impulse" was of prime importance to the entire third cinema movement in Latin America during the 1960s as Julianne Burton recognizes by devoting almost 40 per cent of her book, *Cinema and Social Change in Latin America* to it, through interviews with vanguard filmmakers such as Birri, Jorge Sanjines (Bolivia), Patricio Guzman (Chile) and Jorge Silva/Marta Rodriguez (Colombia).¹¹

The intervention of documentary style into a fictional domain, offering unexpected surprises to audiences, is a feature of many Cuban films. For example, in *Memories of Underdevelop-*

ment (directed by Tomas Gutierrez Alea, 1968), the fictional action is constantly disrupted by the inclusion of documentary footage aiming at distancing the spectator from emotional identification with the characters, consequently bringing him/her back to reality. The use of a documentary technique to resemble real life also characterizes the visual style of Cuban films that aim at a historical reconstruction and revision of the past. This is the case in *The Other Francisco* (Sergio Giral, 1975) and especially in *The Last Charge of the Machete* (Manuel Octavio Gomez, 1969) which like Peter Watkins' *Culloden* (BBC-TV, 1966) purports to be an actual documentary with interviewer and hand-held camera in an era before film technology existed.

The general idea of heightened realism through pseudo-documentary, of course, is not new and its beginnings can be traced to the revolutionary forms of Soviet films in the 1920s, and after Fascism and the Second World War in Italy's Neo-realism. Satyajit Ray's *Pather Panchali* (1955), the pioneer film of the Indian alternative "other cinema" was remarkable for reviving the realist mode to the extent of outdoing neo-realism, while early

feature films, *Lucia* (Humberto Solas, 1968) incorporates a political discourse through the use of style. Documentary style is championed while complex allusions to "first" and "second" cinemas implicitly criticize these forms. *Lucia* is in three parts. Each part tells the story of a different Cuban woman named Lucia at a different historical period, with each having the date as sub-title. The first is set in 1895 during the colonial period, the second in 1932 during neo-colonialism and a failed revolution, and the third in the present, 196 . . . The first Lucia belongs to the plantocracy, the second is middle class and the third is a peasant woman.¹²

In "1895" Lucia, passive and naive — she has waited years for a suitable man to come into her life — learns of her double betrayal: her lover's fighting against Cuba and killing her revolutionary brother. Passionate yet melodramatic, the story is matched stylistically, being filmed in fast, high contrast stock and with delirious camera movement and flashy editing. In its hyperbole, even outrageousness (the phallic imagery is at times crude to the point of comedy), the segment criticizes the histrionics and operatic melodrama of traditional, personalized portrayals of history in "first cinema" (for example, *The Birth of a Nation*, 1915) while simul-



Lucia

Cinema Novo is also defined by a black and white/location shooting/hand-held camera style, of which Nelson Pereira dos Santos' *Vidas Secas* (*Barren Lives*, 1963) is a good example. African filmmaker Ousmane Sembene also considered it the most appropriate organic style to tell the misfortunes of Djuana, the *Black Girl* (*La noire de . . .* Senegal, 1964) in the hands of the greedy bourgeois French couple of Antibes. Moreover, one of the first Cuban fiction

taneously allowing the director to display his vibrant mastery of the medium. The second Lucia, though more in control of her own life (since she works in a factory) is a passive witness to her husband, Aldo's destruction. Despite an aura of hopeless alienation at the end, it is inferred that she has come to understand well the oppression of her husband's ill-fated socialist movement by the dictator, Machado. Interestingly, on a cinematic level, bourgeois "2nd

Cinema" is being implicitly critiqued in the "1932" part of *Lucia*. Often, the composition of the frame is unbalanced with a character placed at one extreme edge. The segment also contains many relatively silent, extended takes in long shot and extreme-long shot (particularly on Lucia after Aldo's death), and both of these techniques recall much of Antonioni's work and express a similar sense of alienation (from other characters and the environment). By contrast, the third part is filmed in the style of the hard-edged realism of cinema verité.

The third Lucia is dynamic as opposed to passive, and she struggles with her husband in order to admit a teacher (part of the literacy campaign) into their house. She takes on the role of being an agent for change and tries to educate her "ignorant" husband. In "196 . . .," learning itself is a theme and the film ends openly with Lucia still struggling against machismo. Indeed, *Lucia* exemplifies a response to Solanas/Getino's call for a third cinema which raised consciousness, conducts social analysis and acts as a catalyst to social transformation. Also, *Lucia* implicitly advocates the documentary as the primary mode of 3rd Cinema.

On the other hand, the reduction of the documentary style into purely fictional narrative can also be considered problematic, where, for example in Gino Pontecorvo's *Battle of Algiers* (Italy, 1966), a skin of "reality" hides Hollywoodian bones. In films such as this (and those of Constantin Costa-Gavras), no space is provided between the spectator and the film's characters and action. Too much "realism" and the emotional engagement of the spectator subvert the potential for analysis.¹³ Another problem with the "documentary impulse" is that in other Third World countries, particularly in Africa, where documentary has traditionally been the primary mode, the means of production have been controlled from outside. Anthropological filmmakers, though well meaning in their documentation of vanishing cultural practices, make their films for foreign — i.e., European or North American — viewers. Even Jean Rouch, the French ethnographer and innovative pioneer of cinema verité, occasionally falls into the trap of using voice-over narration in order to explain events in the language of the "outside" viewer — i.e., in English or French. Such a practice limits the Third World person from speaking for him/herself and continues a power imbalance where the former colonizer rules the soundtrack with his "voice of

God narration" (the voice-over is invariably male).

On a more positive note, in recent years documentary filmmakers have received more exposure in the West — eg, Anand Patwardan with *Bombay our City* (1985) — and at least one, Trinh T. Minh-ha, initially from Vietnam, has actively worked against the Euro-American anthropological bias by making questioning, open-ended films in another Third World region, one relatively strange to her — West Africa. Also, some theoretical attention has lately been paid to documentary; an area traditionally ignored by First World theorists. In *Ideology and the Image*, Bill Nichols questions the naive trust that audiences place in the documentary filmmaker and proposes a model for an ideal non-fiction approach combining "indirect address" through objective observation — as against "direct" voice-over — with a deconstructive, "metalinguistic" self-aware analysis.¹⁴ In this he is close to the Third Cinema ideas of Solanas/Getino and the Cuban school, and in focusing on the problems involved in purportedly the most objective of films — ethnographic ones — he situates his theoretical approach firmly in the Third World.

Endnotes

1. Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas, "Towards a Third Cinema," first appeared in *Tricontinental*, No. 13, reprinted in *Afterimage* (London), No. 3 (Summer 1971), p. 21. Their approach to the Hollywood mainstream is similar to that of the French film critics of the late '60s — writing for *Cinethique* as well as *Cahiers du Cinema* — who like Jean Luc Godard, no longer viewed Hollywood film with any fondness. The auteur "trees" have been lost in the "forest" of an industry which is now looked upon with more disdain than in any previous era. The audience has become a passive "victim" who is likened to a prisoner chained to his seat in Plato's cave (eg. Beaudry) or as one subjected to the "apparatus" of Hollywood (via Althusser) or, through another analogy, to an adult seduced into regressing to the mirror stage (by way of Lacan) or, even, sutured through point-of-view editing to the film itself. Thus, contemporary Euro-American theory moves away from a consideration of the cinematic to the experience of the spectator, especially one confronted with the dreaded power of the "Classical Hollywood Cinema" — 1st Cinema indeed.
2. Getino & Solanas, p. 21.
3. Jean Luc Godard, quoted in Getino & Solanas, p. 17.
4. Getino & Solanas, p. 35.
5. For this scheme, as for some of the other ideas in this article I am indebted to Joao Luiz Viera, in particular his PhD comprehensive examina-

tion in 3rd World Cinema, written at NYU in 1980. We worked closely together in studying for the exam; a wonderfully stimulating experience, and a highlight of my film education.

6. Getino & Solanas, pp. 27-28.
7. See Robert Stam, "On the Margins: Brazilian Avant-Garde Cinema," in Randall Johnson and Stam, *Brazilian Cinema* (Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1982), especially pp. 306-307.
8. Julio Garcia Espinosa, "For an Imperfect Cinema," trans. from Italian by Rosalind Delmar and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Afterimage* (London), No. 3, (Summer 1971), pp. 54-67.
9. Espinosa, p. 64.
10. Alfredo Guevara, interviewed by Sandra Levinson, in August, 1971; in handout, reprinted from the programme book of the "1st New York Festival of Cuban Films" (1972), p. 5.
11. Julianne Burton, "The Documentary Impulse: The Drama of Reality," in *Cinema and Social Change in Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), pp. 1-102. Also, Solanas and Getino wrote: "The cinema known as documentary, with all the vastness that the concept has today, from educational films to the reconstruction of a fact or a historical event, is perhaps the main basis of revolutionary filmmaking," p. 26.
12. For a close visual analysis of *Lucia*, see John Mraz, "Lucia: Visual style and historical portrayal," *Jump Cut*, No. 19 (December, 1978), pp. 21-27. Mraz recognizes the "juxtaposition of different film forms" in *Lucia*, which he terms "formal resonance," p. 21. He employs numerous film frames to illustrate his arguments on visual style, but he doesn't always focus on the important elements, and he stresses the presence of documentary in the first part too much, I feel. Ultimately, a more useful if shorter account is provided in an earlier review by Peter Biskind in *Jump Cut* (July/August, 1974). See also, my own analysis of *Lucia*, in Frank N. Magill, ed., *Magill's Survey of Cinema: Foreign Language Films*, Vol. 4 (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Salem Press, 1985), pp. 1858-1863.
13. Also, it is necessary to state that the Cuban experiment has not been rigorously sustained. The nation-wide education and concurrent demystification of film techniques continues through such television programmes as "24 Frames per Second," but the majority of Cuban feature films that are made today are more like Hollywood films than ever. The use of documentary style as a mark of cinematic truth continues though, for example in Pastor Vega's *En el aire* (*On the Air*, 1988).
14. Bill Nichols, *Ideology and the Image* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981). See especially, "Documentary, Criticism, and the Ethnographic Film: The Search for a Model," pp. 275-284. Also, for a refreshing, mostly 3rd World perspective on its own films, see John D.H. Downing, ed., *Film and Politics in the Third World* (New York: Autonomedia, 1987).

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BOOK REVIEW

Two Books on Third World Film



The Hour of the Furnaces

Third World Film Making and the West
Roy Armes
University of California Press, 1987
381 pages; \$24.95

Film & Politics in the Third World
Edited by John D.H. Downing
Autonomedia, Inc., 1987
317 pages; \$17.95

by Mary Alemany-Galway

Any discussion of Third World films should begin with a definition of the concept of the Third World. Roy Armes in *Third World Film Making and the West* defines Third World countries as those once colonized nations that are still underdeveloped because of their economic exploitation by the West. This, I assume, accounts for the rather strange title of this book since the emphasis here is given to the relationship between Third World filmmaking in particular, and the West in general. Yet, I did not find that this emphasis was reflected in the writing. And for good reason, since the primary concern of a Third World filmmaker is not his relationship to the West (although this may be one of his concerns) but his relationship to his country and his people. It seems to me that the title points to an uneasiness that Roy Armes feels in writing about this subject. It is hard to pinpoint why he feels so uneasy. The book is thoroughly researched and highly informative and yet reading it leaves me feeling frustrated and angry. Perhaps Armes' uneasiness stems from the fact that he is a First World critic writing about Third World films. I don't think

that this is necessarily bad. Critics in the First World can be of great help in bringing these films and their issues to the attention of the public. But, in trying to give an objective, scholarly account of Third World filmmaking, Armes adopts the very stance towards these filmmakers that they are fighting against. That is, he takes the Third World filmmakers as his object of study, in the scientific manner, and therefore he cannot avoid objectifying them and adopting a somewhat paternalistic tone. Third World filmmakers are struggling to become subjects rather than the objects that they had been in a colonial context. They are trying to define their own identity as separate from the West rather than in relation to it. They are fighting to find their own language and their own identity centred in their own culture. But of course, this is true only of a certain kind of Third World filmmaker and this point brings up another problem with the book.

Roy Armes' aim is to give an overview of Third World films and thus he includes both films that are made solely for the purpose of entertainment and those that deal with social and political issues. The aim is laudable in itself, since it allows for a fuller understanding of Third World film culture as it exists but it tends to be rather disappointing in practice. First of all, there are so many films covered that the reader tends to get lost in a mass of details. Few of the films are described in enough detail to make them come alive in the mind of the reader, except at the end, in the "auteur" section, and even here there

are problems. Four of the filmmakers focused upon in this section, that is Glauber Rocha, Yilmaz Guney, Ousmane Sembene and Jorge Sanjinés, are politically committed and even the other two, Satyajit Ray and Youssef Chahine, are concerned with social issues. And yet, although Roy Armes is obviously sympathetic to their aims and often praises their films for the manner in which they communicate the urgency of these issues to the audience there is an ambiguity in his writing which is disturbing. This ambiguity shows up even in the discussion of particular films. For instance, *Blood of the Condor* (1969), directed by Jorge Sanjinés, is a film which denounces the US for its attempts to decimate the Indian population of Bolivia by sterilizing its women without their knowledge or consent. Somehow, Armes can reduce this to "the ruinous impact of US Peace Corps workers, who bring alien values (and covert sterilization) to the Altiplano." (p. 298)

This ambiguity is also present throughout the rest of the book. For instance, in "Part Two: Theory and Practice of Third World Film Making," when writing about the revolutionary Third World filmmakers and theorists of the '60s, he makes this statement — "To some extent, the optimism of the late 1960s has proved to be ill founded, having underestimated in particular the extremes to which the United States is willing to go to protect its 'interests.'" (p. 100) How anyone could read Solanas and Getino's seminal article, "For a Third Cinema" (which he quotes in his chapter on Third Cinema) with its call

for a revolutionary cinema in the face of US imperialist domination, or see their epic documentary, *The Hour of the Furnaces* (1968), with its bitter denunciation of Third World exploitation and call these filmmakers optimistic and unwilling to face the extremes that the US will go to is beyond me. This chapter somehow gives the impression that the fight against imperialism might be well meaning but useless.

Strangely enough, Armes seems almost to apologize for having to include a discussion of the films of Cuba, Angola and China in his book. Perhaps he feels this way because their revolutions were successful. However, as he himself points out, these countries were colonies and therefore they also suffered from underdevelopment. But they have become Marxist and somehow Armes feels that he should focus on "developing countries with a market economy." (p. 10) Why is this? There are problems, in terms of Third Cinema, with a communist country like China that has taken up socialist realism as its official film style. But, if he is willing to include commercial films, why not socialist realism? As for Angola and Cuba, he himself admits that to omit them would cause problems since they have exerted a great influence on the films of Latin America and Africa. So in the end he includes these Marxist countries and certainly he would have a hard time justifying their exclusion. But why the apologies? Questions like these kept cropping up as I read the book and made me rather uneasy.

And yet, the book is so well researched that it will be endlessly useful to anyone interested in the field. The bibliography alone is worth the price of the book as it runs to 34 pages. In some ways, it is too well researched for the different points-of-view on each issue are set out at such length that one loses interest in the debate. Armes' stance is so ambiguous that it is hard to tell what his point-of-view might be. His objective approach to the subject matter again serves him badly. Yet his goals for the book seem ideal and the structure well thought out. One can only agree that films should be studied in relation to their social, cultural and economic context. The historical background that he gives for each country that he covers is highly useful. The discussion of the "Theory and Practice of Third World Filmmaking" which takes up the second part of the book is, I think, a necessity for any book on the subject of Third World film. The third part on the "National Film Industries" is also use-

ful for it provides the background necessary for the discussion of the particular filmmakers that takes up the fourth and last part of the book.

It is exactly this kind of carefully structured approach to the subject that is missing in *Film and Politics in the Third World*, edited by John D.H. Downing. This book is a collection of essays about Third World films and interviews with Third World filmmakers. The essays deal with the films both in terms of their place in national cinemas and as works of particular authors. But we are not given a carefully structured introduction to the subject as in Roy Armes' book. The foreword by Downing is only two pages long. There is barely any attempt to define the term, Third World, or what the theoretical context of the study of Third World film might be. Yet, I think that it is the more useful of the two books, particularly for someone who has never studied the subject before.

The strength of the book resides in the fact that it is a collection of essays written by a variety of authors. Therefore, the reader can experience a number of different approaches to Third World film and yet each approach is consistent within itself since it forms the basis of each essay. The essays focus on one particular national cinema or filmmaker from the point-of-view of one writer rather than the compilation of different points-of-view that one gets in Armes' book. Downing has also been careful to include many Third World writers and the concern that they feel for the fate of their own people informs the essays with an urgency that cannot be duplicated by the objective point-of-view. The weakness of the book, however, can also be found in this diversity of approaches for, unavoidably, some of the essays are weaker in quality than other.

The book is also very useful because it covers a wide range of countries. The films of some of these, such as those of Iran and China, are not very well known and Downing performs a real service in bringing them to our attention. If Downing's goal is that of "communicating the fascination of little-known artistic excellence (with a political sting), and of developing international comprehension in a nation which seems bent on understanding neither others nor itself" (x Foreword), it is well served by the book. The biggest flaw in this book is the need for either a long introduction or the inclusion of some essays on the theory and history of the subject. In part this lack is made up

by the interviews with the filmmakers themselves. For no one can speak as lucidly and passionately as, for example, Sembene Ousmane, the great African filmmaker, on the needs of his people and on the necessity of making films that will fill these needs. Downing does to some extent set the articles in their historical and political context for the reader by sometimes providing introductions to the essays and by providing footnotes as well.

The title of Downing's book, *Film & Politics in the Third World*, seems to me to be, as in Armes' case, also somewhat ambiguous. I gather that he is trying to account for a broader spectrum of subjects than those that would only be related to political films per se. Some of the filmmakers, such as the Algerian Merzak Allouache, are themselves avoiding the political propaganda type of film, or as in the case of the Chinese filmmaker Xie Jin, the rigours of socialist realism. The weakness of the title is that it is ambiguous, since one could write about commercial Third World films and discuss their relation to politics. A reading of the book makes it obvious that this is not what Downing is interested in.

On the whole, the two books complement each other. Roy Armes' book is useful for the historical background that it provides. Downing's book communicates the aims and concerns of Third World filmmakers and the passion and urgency that they feel for their subject. One thing that is missing in both books is the attempt to define a style or cinematic language which might be shared by politically and socially conscious filmmakers of the Third World. It is something that Teshome Gabriel tries to do in his pioneering work, *Third Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetics of Liberation*,² and I think that it is an important part of the discussion on Third World film.

Footnotes

1. F. Solanas and O. Getino, "Toward a third cinema," in *Movies and Methods*, Vol. I, edited by Bill Nichols (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 44-64.
2. Teshome Gabriel, *Third Cinema in the Third World*, (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1982) (*Studies in Cinema*, #21)

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Festival of Festivals

1989

Each September in Toronto, the *Festival of Festivals* premieres several hundred films from all over the world in a ten-day orgy of screenings. It's a strange combination of Hollywood glitz and adventurous programming which introduces local audiences to the real diversity—formally, nationally, and politically—of world cinema. The following short reviews examine a few of the films this year.

by members of the editorial collective

Summer of Aviya: A Contemporary Melodrama

by Florence Jacobowitz

Two very accomplished films screened at this year's Festival of Festivals can be described as contemporary revisions of the melodrama—a genre which flowered during the classical period in Hollywood. The melodrama and its sub-sections (the woman's film and the variations of the genre centred upon love/romance/adultery/small town life) evolved from the traditions of late eighteenth and nineteenth century drama and the woman's novel, and articulated concerns and desires pertinent to its largely female audience. The genre remains an important focal point for feminist film theory and criticism because its narratives are charged by the contradictions and dissatisfactions which characterize the normative female experience in a masculine-dominant, bourgeois society. The two films I'm thinking of, Eli Cohen's *Summer of Aviya* (1988) (which

should be translated as *Aviya's Summer*) and Krzysztof Zanussi's *Year of the Quiet Sun* (1984), are both period pieces set in the aftermath of the Second World War. (Zanussi's film merits further discussion, but because of the limitations of space, I am restricting my discussion to the most recent of the two.) The period film immediately speaks of distance; *Summer of Aviya* encourages the spectator both to identify and empathize with the protagonists' experiences, and to step back and

see their stories set against a broader social context. The historical placement does not detract from the film's relevance to a contemporary audience. The kinds of issues explored—the inutility of women's sacrifice and the manifestation of illness as a form of muted protest—continue to be significant in a society still structured by the same systems of oppression.

I'd like to note a few points in particular about *Summer of Aviya* (which won last year's Silver Bear award in Berlin)



Summer of Aviya

in terms of the genre it draws from and the problems it addresses. The film relates a young girl's perceptions (Aviya, played by Kaipo Cohen) of one brief summer vacation when her mother, provisionally released from hospital, collects her from boarding school and makes an attempt to live like every other 'normal' family. It is 1951, a year which signifies a period of Jewish hope and rebirth specific to the population of Israel as it is only three years since the founding of the state, and six years after the end of World War II. This post-war commitment to settlement and social entrenchment, defined by precise ideological norms of gender and family relations, was one shared by many Western nations and manifests itself in the '50s spirit of insularity and conformity. As in the traditions of the genre, the protagonists' needs, frustrations and desires are placed against larger social patterns and the spectator is offered a critical perspective denied them. Aviya's mother Henya (played by Gila Almagor, who assisted in the scripting of the film from her autobiographical novel and gives a superb performance) reflects the confusions and contradictions of the period she has survived and the one in which she attempts to establish a place for herself and her daughter.

As in many Hollywood melodramas, the woman's entrapment is sustained by the society's definition of femininity. Aviya's mother is clearly different, marked most prominently by her emotional illness (she is known as Henya the crazy one), by her social/class position (As in many war-time melodramas, the family is imbalanced by the absence of the husband/father who, in this case, was killed during the war. Henya must support her daughter alone on the meagre amounts she earns as a laundress/seamstress, and significantly never speaks of remarrying), and by her past. Henya is often called the "partizona," which is translated in the English subtitles as "partisanke" but the Hebrew delineates the play on words of Partisanzona, meaning partisan — whore. As the film progresses we learn that Henya was active as a partisan fighter in the forests of Eastern Europe. She was, as she recalls, the beautiful Henya, renowned for her beauty and political activity. In the small town community where she and Aviya settle, her heroism is denied and overshadowed by her transgression in usurping the male's role. Emptied of all political significance her activism now connotes sexual deviance; it is ridiculed and aligned with her

'craziness.' It is significant that the only moment in the film where Henya makes reference to the past is when she is trying to reach out to Alter, a Holocaust survivor who comes to the town to live with his brother, Mr. Ganz, whose severe withdrawal from the outside world is attributed to his surviving his internment in Auschwitz. Alter's illness, like Henya's, is integral to survival — it is a manifestation of resistance, an introverted protest against an intolerable social experience which can no longer be negotiated. The post-war time frame exacerbates the tensions; the ideological demands of normalcy, following an experience which has erased permanently a firm belief in civilization and humanity, results in breakdown. The inability to live with the contradictions others deny, is expressed as illness.

This thematic is introduced with a startling directness near the film's opening. When Henya finds lice in her daughter's unkempt hair, she is appalled by the implications of neglect and the lack of hygiene, and shaves Aviya's head frantically and almost violently. The act initiates Aviya, ironically, into her mother's experiences of imprisonment and humiliation, (and the mythified obsession with "cleanliness as purity") suffered at the hands of the Nazis. At the same time, fulfilling social demands of health, cleanliness and hygiene defines a good mother. As Henya remarks, "No daughter of mine will have lice."

Aviya is aware of her mother's multiplicity of differences which combine to exclude them both from the community. Aside from Henya's recent past in Europe, her lack of facility with the new language ("Yom Huledet/Happy Birthday is *two* words," Aviya reminds her) and her class position set her apart from the wealthy 'cultured' ladies like Mrs. Abramson and her daughter Maya. Henya's illness surfaces when she asserts herself, refusing to conform to petty communal rules. She does not allow Aviya to dress formally for Maya's coveted weekly music recitals (where 'culture' is inspired by the playing of Swan Lake), she demands that neighbours and passersby celebrate Aviya's birthday despite their clear intentions to boycott and ignore her party, and she attends the Abramson's soiree, from which she has been pointedly excluded. Despite the painful embarrassment, Aviya remains fiercely proud of her mother and is committed to supporting her. Like Henya, Aviya is a survivor and is equally assertive. She frequently corrects people who either

mistake or deliberately transform her odd non-Hebrew name Aviya into the more conventional Aviva. She also decides wisely (however unconsciously) that entry into the community can be gained by reinstating the missing father (thus re-establishing the ideal nuclear family) and elevating their class position. Sensing a new neighbour's attraction to her mother, Aviya fantasizes that the respectable bourgeois Mr. Ganz (played by the director, Eli Cohen) is, in fact, her father who has reappeared but cannot admit to his identity because he has since remarried and has a child. Aviya finds him a suitable fantasy figure because he is tall, handsome and sophisticated, professes to be a banker and always dresses in a suit, unlike the other casually dressed men in the small town. She witnesses his domestic arguments with his non-Jewish wife and senses his unhappiness. The cultural contradictions Cohen painstakingly brings to life of the post war survivor/emigré community are poignant and insightful. One finds a country of new immigrants, many of whom are Holocaust survivors whose families have been decimated, desperately clinging to a vision of life made coherent by a family structure. At the same time, they have had little opportunity to recuperate from the extreme traumas experienced or to mourn their losses, and are forced to plunge into new identities, new families, new communal rules in a newly established country far from Europe. Many quickly remarry yet still find themselves, years later, ascertaining who has survived the death camps. Daily the community members desperately listen to radio reports of newly-arrived immigrants searching for lost relations, hoping that someone with some connection will surface and fill in the obliterated past.

Despite Aviya's attempts to make sense of her and her mother's world, there is no possibility of reconciling the contradictions, and hence, no place for the happy ending. Aviya's summer is brief. Mr. Ganz (demystified as a man who plucks chickens for a living and masquerades as a banker for the purpose of winning respect and status in the small town) packs up his family and leaves when Aviya's fantasies are made public. As in the traditions of the genre, Henya's inability to reintegrate into society and maintain a stable identity as mother, provider and community member, results in her regression into illness, using the metaphor of a train rushing through her head to describe her unbearable pain. The conventions

of the genre — the emotional heightening, the excess and the silent protest — suit the explosive tensions of the era they bring to life, but speak far beyond it. By addressing the still critical politics of class and gender oppression, *Summer of Aviya* contributes richly to Israel's popular representations of its social history, and, at the same time, transcends its national boundaries.

Monsieur Hire: A study of obsession

by Richard Lippe

Patrice Leconte's *Monsieur Hire* is about obsessive love and the film offers through the characters of Monsieur Hire/Michel Blanc and Alice/Sandrine Bonnaire a complex treatment of its subject matter. As the film begins, Hire, a middle-aged tailor who openly identifies himself as anti-social, is suspected of murdering a young woman; but, as the viewer gradually discovers, he is guilty of no more than voyeurism. The object of Hire's voyeuristic gaze is Alice, a seemingly 'average' young woman, who has a room across from his in the adjacent courtyard of the building. When Alice discovers that she is being watched she, after recovering from the initial shock, unexpectedly seeks out Hire and coyly attempts to seduce him. Alice's motives are two-fold: on the one hand, she is genuinely intrigued by Hire and wants to get to know him and, on the other, she wants to discover how much he has seen — it is Alice's boyfriend, Emile/Luc Thuillier, who murdered the young woman and in the aftermath brought a piece of incriminating evidence to her room.

Although Hire is offended by Alice's suggestion that his motives for watching her are primarily to gain sexual gratification, he remains attracted to her and, later, keeps a luncheon date she has suggested. During the luncheon, Hire finds that Alice, despite her youth and unworldliness, has a sensibility strikingly attuned to his own, and a mutual intimacy between the two develops, leading to Hire's revelation of his knowledge about who the killer is. Their meeting functions to intensify his commitment to her and Hire pledges to pro-

tect her from the authorities, offering her an undying love; it is a love that Alice both desires and well understands as she holds the same capacity to love obsessively. (The film tentatively produces another manifestation of obsessive love: the police inspector/André Wilms speaks of the murder victim as if she were his daughter and gives the impression that his investigation is a personal revenge quest. There is also the suggestion that he has an intuitive understanding of what Hire thinks and feels). Ultimately, Alice feels compelled to betray Hire to honour her love of Emile who, when finally suspected, flees, ignoring her pleas to be taken along.

In *Monsieur Hire*, which is based on the Georges Simenon novel "Les Fia-

to make it look as if Hire is the murderer is motivated by her unquestioning acceptance that she and Emile represent in some way a 'normal' coupling. But, despite this commitment, Alice has become sufficiently aware by the film's conclusion to realize that she will live to regret the betrayal of Hire and, by extension, herself.

Similarly, Hire, like Alice, is much less a victimizer than a victim. While the viewer isn't put in the position of identifying directly with Hire, he increasingly becomes a compelling figure who has an emotionally unsettling presence: his persona alternates between conveying an almost contemptuous rejection of humanity and an aching vulnerability in his relations with Alice. (Like Murnau's



Monsieur Hire

naïlles De M. Hire," previously filmed by Julien Duvivier as *Panique* (1946) with Michel Simon and Viviane Romance, Leconte doesn't offer a negative portrait of either Hire or Alice and their behaviour or actions — in fact, the film is highly sympathetic to its protagonists. Although a misogynistic attitude could have been adopted towards Alice making her into a cunning, cruel woman, Leconte conceives her (and Sandrine Bonnaire, like Michel Blanc, gives a beautifully judged and nuanced performance) as a person who possesses imagination, an intuitive intelligence and delicate emotional response but doesn't grasp her full potential; Alice's social conditioning has encouraged her to perceive herself as being 'ordinary' and she aspires to living a conventional life. The implication underpinning her decision

Nosferatu, whom at moments he evokes, Hire begins as a sinister, menacing figure but becomes progressively humanized as the film develops.) The degree to which the latter aspect of his presence has become a tangible component of his identity for the viewer is evident by the impact of the film's harrowing penultimate sequence in which Hire, in an effort to flee from the knowledge that Alice has abandoned him, plunges to his death while attempting a roof top escape from the authorities. And, clearly, Leconte expresses his affection for Hire and Alice in the film's final shot — a lyrical, 'wish-fulfillment' image of the two embracing. In the shot, Alice's hair is being blown by a wind evoking the earlier church tower sequence in which they first acknowledged their love for each other.

On numerous levels, *Monsieur Hire* is visually a very stylized film: the colour scheme is predominantly sombre although lighter and/or more vibrant colours are associated with Alice to enhance her sensual presence; ostensibly, the action takes place in present day Paris but the film has been designed (i.e., clothing, décor, etc.) to suggest an unspecified time period and part of the location shooting was done in Brussels to re-inforce the sense of disorientation; and, although the film's narrative is linear, the presentation of the events has a dream-like quality or, more precisely, that of a nightmare. What Leconte achieves through this stylization is a calling into question of the convenient divisions society uses to distinguish between human experiences: objective/subjective, normal/neurotic, good/evil. In Leconte's vision, there is a complicated interaction between social imperatives and an individual's needs and desires — an interaction that tends to either limit, distort or destroy the individual. The film dramatizes the contradiction that obsessive love, while a product of the culture, is also at odds with it and its definition of the 'normal.'

Monsieur Hire is a highly disturbing film which is simultaneously brutal and tender. Although the film isn't in the least derivative, it suggests certain affinities to the works of Hitchcock and Bunuel and, particularly, Chabrol. *Monsieur Hire*, like Chabrol's *Le Boucher*, is a poetic investigation into the dark reaches of human existence.

Les matins infideles:

Patriarchy and Photography

by Janine Marchessault

The publicity still for *Les matins infideles* (*Unfaithful Mornings*), Jean Beaudry and Francois Bouvier's second co-directed feature is most striking after seeing the film. The photograph depicts a young man, clock under arm, peering nervously over his shoulder at the pages of a novel swept away into the night by wind and snow. He is framed by a harsh brick wall. The image conjures up all the carefully choreographed elements that make the film subtly unnerving.

The man we see is Jean-Pierre and the

clock he carries is essential to the film's complex trajectory through a labyrinth of memory and imagination. The narrative premise for this exploration is revealed to us over the opening credits: every morning for a period of a year at precisely eight o'clock, Jean Pierre will photograph the same street corner in one of Montreal's working class districts. Except for the scenic decor — a corner café, a tree and a bus stop — each photograph will carefully document the myriad elements that make up the banality of the everyday. Jean-Pierre, we soon learn, is to deliver these photographs to his friend and collaborator Marc. Based entirely on these fragments of everyday life, Marc is writing a novel.

Given the number of photographs on the wall in Marc's study, the collaboration has been underway for sometime. With wonderful economy, the film's opening also reveals another aspect of the collaboration: the meeting of memory and imagination is filled with deception. After completing one of the many photographs of the street, Jean-Pierre leaves the corner only to return. He enters the café and swiftly changes the time on the clock that hangs in its window. Unbeknownst to Marc, Jean Pierre rearranges more than just the time. Gestures are staged, a mysterious woman begins to appear in every photograph and finally the clock disappears altogether. In Marc's romantic universe, a woman's sneeze connotes an intrepid flood of sorrow and the clock's disappearance is nothing less than the fickle passing of time. Slowly Jean-Pierre's exacting *mise en scène* comes to dictate the narrative flow that Marc believes to be inspired by life itself.

The opening premise could easily have fueled a screenplay filled with clever twists and semiotic charts. Instead, Bouvier and Beaudry exercise a surprising restraint when they direct the narrative toward the collaborators themselves, focussing on the banality and the horror of their everyday lives. The film's premise then, functions as a complex framing device foregrounding the dubious project of documenting life 'unawares.' Such a project can be seen to reflect the dominant cinematic approach in Quebec during the '60s and '70s — a period that Michel Houle has called the discovery of "Us, the ordinary people." While the filmmakers are clearly critical of this tradition, they nevertheless utilize many of its salient features: the emphasis on place, the rendering of events in a mundane chronological order that favours the epi-

sodic, the construction and definition of characters in terms of their social and economic relations and finally, the grounding of events and characters in a quotidian context. So, though the filmmakers emphasize the processes of imagination inherent in all 'faithful' depictions, they never venture into the imaginary. Their narrative remains on all levels — contradictorily — bound to a realistic economy.

The dialectic of memory and imagination, inextricably tied to a material world, not only frames the relationship between Jean-Pierre and Marc, it is also played out through it. From the beginning the two men seem at odds with each other. This is seen not only in terms of their respective mediums (images vs. words), but also, in a general way, through their very different personalities: Jean Pierre is frenetic, personable and unreliable while Marc appears melancholic, remote and full of idealism. Their relationships with women are absolutely central to these differences. Jean-Pierre seems to be embarking on a passionate love affair with Julie, planning a life with her that includes children and moving to the country. Marc, on the other hand, is in the process of ending a long standing relationship with Pauline who is moving out of their apartment. Marc attempts to be the understanding lover giving Pauline the freedom she desperately needs. Jean-Pierre wants to consume Julie as one would a morsel of food, telling her fondly: "J'ai le goût de toi". Yet while one relationship seems built on future dreams and the other on past memories, Beaudry and Bouvier turn this around. Unable to engage in a caring relationship with Julie (or with any woman), Jean-Pierre simply exchanges her for someone else; with each new woman he will whisper the same words of love (rendered meaningless through repetition): "I want to have a child with you." It is soon clear that Jean-Pierre's six year old son who visits on weekends must have been conceived with the same deceptive words.

Jean-Pierre's inability to take responsibility for his relationships with women is mirrored in the way he earns his living. While Marc teaches writing at a nearby college and is actively involved in union struggles (he even attempts to educate his students about these struggles), Jean-Pierre works as a freelance photographer specializing in food displays for expensive restaurants. While Marc insists on the historical class struggle, Jean-Pierre has no sense of history as he endlessly supplies the capital-

ist apparatus of bourgeois consumption — as with the women he knows, his only interest is in mindless reproduction. And it is precisely Jean-Pierre's complicity with patriarchal capitalism that leads to his own demise. Through a web of lies and deceptions he loses his job, he is evicted from his apartment, he becomes alienated from Marc and Julie, and finally from Laurent.

To the film's great credit it is never moralizing. While it insists on its oppositions, they are never simply unilateral. Rather, as the film unfolds, the oppositions between Jean-Pierre and Marc are constantly shifting — becoming at once more profound and more ambiguous. A structured identification is set up with Jean-Pierre who is portrayed with exceptional sympathy by Denis Bouchard. This identification becomes increasingly difficult as Jean-Pierre breathes new life into the spectres of patriarchy. Sensitive to this difficulty, the filmmakers appear to unsettle our complicity (a complicity which varies according to gender) when they shift the pattern of identification towards Marc. Over half-way into the film, we begin to see Jean-Pierre through Marc's eyes: with a mixture of empathy and impatience.

Marc's point of view however, proves to be equally precarious. Where he appears to be the understanding lover, he is not: his gentle prodding — the way he interrogates Pauline's need for sexual freedom — masks a violence which is just as oppressive as Jean-Pierre's mindless engagement. This parallel is also evidenced in his fantasy romance with the *mysterious woman* in Jean-Pierre's photographs. In many ways, she embodies the different terms through which both men relate to the reality of women. Jean-Pierre, having befriended her at the bus stop, seduces her and then spends the last half of the film hiding from her because she has become pregnant. Ignorant of this relationship and knowing her only through Jean-Pierre's photographs, Marc comes to centre his entire novel around her minute gestures, idolizing and, finally, falling in love with her image. Marc is inordinately jealous when, later in the film, Jean-Pierre confesses that he has been having an affair with her and that she is pregnant. The infinitely exchangeable (women as commodities) and the sacred (women as untouchable) constitute a familiar dichotomy within patriarchal culture — two sides of the same coin under capitalism.

Like Jean-Pierre, Marc's inability to handle the contradictions of his rela-



Les Matins Infidèles

tionships with women (their sexuality) parallels his political engagement. Although strongly committed to his labour union, Marc quits his job in a tantrum when a strike is usurped. He locks himself away in his study, secure in the solitary knowledge that he has principles. In lieu of any collective action which is always tainted by contradiction, he comes to favour his own smug authority — literally masturbating over the pages and the images of his unfinished novel. *Marc and Jean-Pierre have now moved in together.*

Working towards the completion of their infamous project, both men want to assert their subjectivity over the profound workings of life . . . because both are unable to live it. Jean-Pierre believes that he can simply rearrange it as he likes, he is incapable of generating any feeling for it (or its inhabitants). Marc, on the other hand, has a great romantic love of life but only at a distance and only in mythological terms — he has no desire to know where the street corner is located and no need to meet the enigmatic woman. Both men live in a carefully constructed world whose glistening surface never manages to touch them very deeply.

Their only link to reality, it would seem, is through Laurent. In an attempt to help Jean-Pierre who is growing more desperate by the day (hiding from lovers, employers and bills), Marc takes care of his child. As he does this, he begins to discover the possibilities of a nurturing — maternal — relationship and, for the first time, we see his self-righteous facade crack. But as Marc discovers his own ability to nurture,

Jean-Pierre is increasingly aware of his own limitations as a father to Laurent.

It is clear throughout the film that Laurent idolizes his father, imitating his gestures, his turns of phrase and his views of women. Yet, Jean-Pierre, unable to look after himself, is inept and impatient with Laurent. This is finally actualized when, in a moment of distracted irritation, he hits his son hard across the face. This act moves beyond the realm of mere physical violence. Given Jean-Pierre's utter devastation and remorse after hitting his son, we sense something deeper at work. Through his own violence, he seems to grasp a more profound and hidden violence. A violence dictated by father/son relations under patriarchy, by the mechanics of repression and socialization, by the conditioning of male behaviour and by the normalizing of aggression.

There is a purposeful and sad resolve to the day Jean-Pierre spends with his son after the incident. When he consciously leaves his camera behind on a park bench before taking Laurent home to his mother, we know this is their last day together. Sitting in the taxi outside the house, Jean-Pierre painstakingly passes on one of life's simple lessons: how to lace a shoe.

It is the culmination of a violent self-realization (the only kind patriarchy knows), that incites Jean-Pierre to turn his aggression inward. And it is Marc who discovers his friend's body swinging by the neck in an open window, one shoelace untied. The final discovery is striking not only because it is unexpected, but because it is so calmly reas-

suring. The open window, the bright summer's day, the breeze all point towards a new beginning; a beginning that is marked by the death of the *Father* who never learned to love. This is why the publicity still for *Les matins infidèles* — which reflects the dark winter morning that opens the film — embodies so much meaning: it is visually opposed to the serenity of that room where Jean-Pierre takes his own life. Unlike the father's death in *Un zoo la nuit* which works to redeem him — ensure his proper place as patriarch — the final suicide in *Les matins infidèles* signals the end of a cycle of terror.

The possibilities for this new beginning, though still unspoken, are inherent in the last images of the film. Framed in a long shot that recalls Jean-Pierre's photographs, we see Marc on the street corner. He is speaking to the (no longer mysterious) woman who, for many days has been looking for Marc. Although we do not hear what they are saying, we know that the romantic spell — imposed on the working class district and on the woman by a particular world view — has been shattered. The child she carries may have a chance ... if history does not repeat itself.

Five Films at the Festival

by Susan Morrison

After last year's film festival, I had decided to forego any further exposure to the incredibly long line-ups, over-crowded movie theatres, and frustrating film-watching conditions (poor quality projection, continuous talking and frequent distracting walk-outs) which Toronto's festival goers have too patiently put up with. However, as the time approached for this year's opening, I reluctantly gave in, convinced on the one hand by my fellow collective members that it might be interesting for us to do short reviews of the films we see, and on the other, by the advance notice that a new film by Chantal Akerman would be screened. Consequently, I purchased a limited 5 tickets, promising myself I would pre-select my films with extreme care, so that the one hour pre-performance wait in line would hopefully not be a waste of time.

I never have figured out how so many people can get off work in order to attend the daily daytime screenings; my job prevents me from even looking at what's playing before 4:30 p.m. Fortunately, those films which most interested me were on either on the weekend or at around 6 o'clock in the evening. Chantal Akerman's *American Stories* was the first film I saw, on the first Saturday of the festival. I was quite surprised to discover that there was not an enormous line-up for it, for my previous experiences with

In addition, these confessions are punctuated by burlesque-type routines of 'character' actors doing ancient and clichéd 'Jewish jokes' of the Bernstein/-Goldberg variety. Towards the end of the film, both come together in an outdoor cafe-type setting, where the actors who portrayed the story-tellers now play different roles, seated at tables illuminated by garlands of glowing lights. As with a Pina Bausch Wuppertal Dance-theatre production, the characters group and re-group in a kind of contemporary



American Stories

her films have been that they customarily draw a large faithful crowd of followers. That contingent appeared to be mainly absent from the audience at the film's first screening. I imagine the reason was that the film is not concerned with her usual feminist themes, but deals with the experiences of Jews, both male and female, who emigrated to New York at the beginning of this century. The film's structure reveals Akerman's non-traditional approach to film-making, insofar as there is not a story-line in the conventional sense of a narrative film. Yet the film is not a documentary either. The first part consists of episodic close-ups of single individuals who talk directly to a stationary camera, revealing to the film audience their most poignant individual histories with regards to the difficulties of coming to America, and adjusting to a new way of life. But Akerman does not permit the audience to pretend that the actors are really the individuals whose stories are being told, for the tales are told in the past tense, as with grandparents, while the actors themselves are young and dressed in timeless rather than historical costume.

Dance of Life. In fact, the overall structure and mood of this film is very reminiscent of the German choreographer's unique approach to dance performance, calling to mind what must have been Akerman's conscious homage to Pina Bausch, *Toute Une Nuit* of several years ago.

Robert Kramer's film *Route One* is a 240 minute quasi-documentary which purports to follow the travels of a character identified as 'Doc' as he makes his way along the US highway Route One from its northernmost beginnings in New Hampshire to its southern finish in Florida. Kramer, the director, serves as cinematographer too, and in that capacity, plays an acting role in the film for 'Bob' the cinematographer is constantly asking questions of Doc, about his history, his reasons for returning from abroad to the US, his motivations for continuing the trek south, etc. At one point along the way, (around three hours into the film), Doc, who appears to be a political drop-out from the Reagan years, decides that he has to commit himself to a socially useful life, and

chooses to give up his wanderings in order to settle in a community that needs his medical skills. What happens filmically, is that the lead actor drops out of the film, but the film doesn't end, for 'Bob', i.e. the director/cinematographer/camera, takes up the slack by continuing the voyage south, himself. In other words, the viewer is presently made aware of the fact that the camera, also an 'actor,' is now, the 'only' actor. This is all quite strange and requires a certain amount of re-adjustment on the part of the viewer. However, when the 'camera' finally arrives at the end of Route one, in southern Florida, Doc somehow re-enters the film, once again becoming a kind of focus for the activity on-screen. This film takes a lot of risks, from its inordinate length to its seemingly non-acting actors, to its continuous re-focusing of characters and events. While it doesn't always succeed, it is nevertheless, an interesting attempt at combining a loving look at the American countryside (gorgeous panoramic views of the landscape) and small town idiosyncrasies, with some pretty ugly dissections of innercity emptiness and despair, all the while maintaining a relatively positive and optimistic view of the possibility of redemption through commitment to social change.

Giuseppe Bertolucci's *Amore in Corso* (Love in Progress) and Sam Fuller's *Street of No Return* were the only narrative films that I saw; the first on a friend's recommendation, and the second out of loyalty to Fuller's '50s films. *Amore in Corso* was mildly disappointing. I suppose it's not fair to judge a country's films against past glories, but as a film goer whose teeth were cut in the '60s on the works of Fellini, Antonioni, Pasolini and, later, Bernardo Bertolucci, Giuseppe's brother, I no longer look to Italy for vanguard, let alone avantgarde filmmaking. *Amore in Corso* is about two schoolgirls of very different appearance and character; one, dreamy and frivolous, and the other, serious and tough-minded. They have come to the former's country villa for a weekend vacation, ostensibly to study for an exam, but in fact, the first girl has invited a boy, Cesare, with whom she is in love. His delayed appearance provides an opportunity for the guest to inform her hostess that she, too, is in love with Cesare. When a third girl, Daniella — a marvelously depicted 'daughter of nouveau riche Italy' — arrives at the villa to wait for Cesare too, they find out not only that she is engaged to Cesare, but that she is also pregnant with his child. So much for their individual romantic fan-

tasies. This recognition of the reality of the situation creates a bonding between them, which strongly suggests a development into a lesbian relationship, although it is never directly presented on screen as such. When Cesare finally does show up at the end of the film, the two girls standing outside the villa in the dark, watch him bang on the door calling out to them, but neither chooses to respond. So, unlike Godot, Cesare does arrive, only to be rejected by those waiting for him. The central metaphor of the film is a toad/(prince) that the girls find and nickname '96', in reference to the same score both got on a 'love test' in a woman's magazine. By the end of the film, '96' has been flattened by Daniella driving away in her car.

I don't really want to say much about Fuller's *Street of No Return*, out of deference to past memories. A Portuguese co-production supposedly set in the US but most obviously using non-English speaking actors, the films was hardly watchable thanks to incredibly inept dubbing, but also in addition, the response of a majority of the audience who laughed their way through the film. There is a certain kind of movie-going audience that considers itself to be 'of a superior sort' and thinks nothing of audibly deriding a film that other more humble types might be trying to watch with whatever degree of seriousness they can muster. I've often wondered why such sophisticated people bother going to films that they know ahead of time, will be flawed. Nonetheless, there was something ineffably creepy about this film, with its beautifully studied cinematographic effects countered by the gratuitous violence (the opening shot is an extreme close-up of a black man's face, which within seconds is smashed by a fist coming in from the right), the artificial quality of the acting including and especially the lead, Keith Carradine which was only heightened by the ludicrous dubbing, and the flatness and predictability of the storyline. I kept thinking of Norma Desmond in *Sunset Boulevard* preparing for her last 'performance.'

Two years ago at the Festival, I saw a documentary film called *My Life for Zarah Leander* by the West German director Christian Blackwood, which greatly impressed me. In the film, Blackwood combined a sort of star biography of Zarah Leander, an actress somewhat reminiscent of Marlene Dietrich, whose career was made during the Nazi period, with personal histories of a totally devoted fan of hers, a man whose life had intertwined with hers because of his fanatic involvement with her 'as star,'

and a female impersonator who had made his career in Germany by playing/-being Zarah Leander. While the possibility of slipping into presenting these two men as bizarre and grotesque figures was omnipresent, Blackwood never allowed that to occur, but maintained at all times a humane and understanding attitude towards them. There are few directors who even try to effect this kind of approach to eccentricity; most Americans, at any rate, seem to foreground the 'otherness' as target for derision and belittling. One outstanding exception to this, for me, is Jonathan Demme, especially in his earlier films like *Handle With Care* (*Citizen's Band*) and *Melvin and Howard*.

This combination of humanitarian warmth with interest in the eccentric also informs Blackwood's new film, *Motel*. This film is Blackwood's homage to American popular culture, especially the 'roadside' variety as seen from a moving car travelling across the (mainly south-western) United States. While the conventional travelling shots of neon motel signs and idiosyncratic motel architecture are employed in the film for continuity, *Motel* does focus on three specific sites. The first is the Silver Saddle motel in Sante Fe, run by three strong and independent women who tell their histories and experiences to the 'camera' in a very natural and unforced way. The second 'stop' is at the Blue Mist motel in Florence, Kansas, a motel whose proximity to the state penitentiary guarantees it a steady clientele of prisoners' wives coming to visit their husbands. We watch them arriving at the motel, settling in, and getting ready for their visits, all the while responding to Blackwood's queries about their relationships with their men. Three women in particular are centred out. One, a former guard at the penitentiary, broke the unwritten codes by falling in love with and marrying one of the convicts. She speaks very directly about the attitude of guards to their prisoners, and especially about the cultivation of hate on a daily basis. We learn that since leaving her job, she has entered a university programme and is writing a book on the prison system. The second woman, of apparently upper middle class background, reflects with great charm and humour on her present situation, and the fact that she has married a man who is a fraud artist. Nevertheless, she does not regret her decision, and offers some thoughts about the unwarranted amount of time he must spend in prison in relation to the terms for those convicted of violent crimes. The third interviewee is a woman in her fifties who



Motel

developed a correspondence with one of the inmates which turned into a love relationship and consequent marriage, even though he is much younger than her. In fact, at first, one assumes that it is her son that she is going to visit. She muses about the difference in years, and how he likes her to wear her hair long even though she doesn't think it fitting for a woman of her age.

The last stop is the Death Valley Hotel, an upgraded motel in a ghost town which has no clientele. It is run by Marta Becket, a former prima ballerina now in her later years, who with her former husband bought the hotel as a home. In addition, they also purchased an abandoned theatre nearby, and fixed it up as a private performance hall for her. On the inside walls of the "Amar-gosa Opera House", Becket spent many months painting a wrap-around captive audience with characters drawn from fairy tales and legends — Siegfried, gypsies, a King and Queen, etc. Surprisingly enough, the artwork is of exceptional quality. As she guides us through the hotel and theatre we learn her history of domineering mother followed by domineering husband, her eventual liberation achieved when the husband ran off with her best friend, thereby forcing her to take control over her own life. Wiegert, the man with whom she now lives, shares her dreams and her performances with great pleasure and enjoyment. For the last few years, the public has been invited in to the theatre, so that the painted audience is reinforced with a live one.

Blackwood was present at the screening, and afterwards, indicated that he had spent hours talking to the people he was going to interview before turning on the camera. This explained how he managed to obtain such non-artificial performances from his interviewees, but it

also underlined the importance he placed on establishing a good relationship with them. Throughout all of the interviews, there is an immediate temptation on the part of the spectator to look on these people as freaks, for what they talk about is so far from conventional everyday experience that it is easier to categorize them as such than to try to come to terms with them. But it is Blackwood's care for his interviewees informed and expressed by his control of the documentary format that refuses to encourage this position. He shows us their ordinariness and their extraordinariness at the same time, opening us up to the recognition of human potential for tolerance and latitude. Even in the most extreme instances, such as when the aged Marta in her long filmy ballet gown dances through the unfinished corridors of the hotel, one is always confronted by the realization that this is a real person, with real hopes and dreams and aspirations just like everyone else. Yes, some people in the audience did laugh at her, just as they laughed at the others, but not because Blackwood asked for this kind of reaction.

New Films by

MacGillivray and Hou

by Robin Wood

In the last issue of *CineACTION!* I ended an article declaring that my two favourite films of the last five

years were William MacGillivray's *Life Classes* and Hou Hsiao Hsien's *Daughter of the Nile*. Both directors had new films in this year's Toronto festival, and it seems appropriate that I comment on these. The commentary will be brief and tentative: a festival is not a context conducive to fully pondered and responsible judgement. I *did*, however, manage to see both films twice, and in each case the second viewing confirmed and strengthened my initial response.

Who is Bill MacGillivray?

I must confess, sadly, that I found MacGillivray's *The Vacant Lot* not merely a disappointment but a disillusionment: I mean by that that it is not simply inferior to *Life Classes* (by any criteria), but that it appears to negate much of what *Life Classes* achieved. It calls into question the nature, and the sincerity, of the commitment to feminism that seemed to me to inform and motivate *Life Classes* (were that film's 'conceptual underpinnings' after all of so little consequence to MacGillivray?). I find it difficult to explain to myself how the same man can have gone on from the earlier film to make the later (though in certain ways that I shall discuss the two are consistent).

There is a more superficial problem with *The Vacant Lot* that may as well be got out of the way first: MacGillivray here has simply not had such good luck — or good judgement — with his actors. Though by the standards by which these things are commonly judged (predominantly those of the professional polish associated with Hollywood), the performances of Jacinta Cormier and Leon Dubinsky in *Life Classes* may appear at times slightly awkward and tentative, I would not change a moment of them: the actors' presences are so strong, and they convey so completely the impression of belonging to their roles, that conventional touchstones become irrelevant. In *The Vacant Lot*, on the other hand, Trudi Peterson, though she looks angelic and is evidently directed and photographed *con amore*, has neither the presence, the ability nor the experience to carry the film to which she is unfortunately central. The male lead, Grant Fullerton, is adequate without being interesting. The rendering of the other crucial character, Patti, the organizer and star performer of the 'Vacant Lot' rock group, is frankly amateurish and very grating. I sense that this last is MacGillivray's fault: it is obvious that he lavished a lot

of care and attention on Peterson, if to little avail, but his manifest animus towards the character seems, in the case of Patti, to have resulted in his asking nothing from the performer besides a display of relentless shrillness, devoid of nuance or complexity.

I want first to salvage what I can from the wreckage: *The Vacant Lot* is certainly not without interest (its last 15 minutes seem to me to rise to a level well above the rest of the film), and its relation to *Life Classes* is not exclusively one of negation. Or, to be more precise, in certain limited ways the negation works as dialectic. For a start, the film, like *Life Classes*, is about a woman in the process of breaking with the environment in which she grew up and seeking to define herself (the difference is that the film finally defines *her* in relation to a male and in opposition to a genuinely autonomy-seeking female). Here, however, in strong contradistinction to the emphasis in *Life Classes* on the preservation of the female line, Trudi is compelled to reject *both* parents (while accepting a replacement father/lover): the break with the past, with the cultural tradition within which she has grown up, is complete, and this break is paralleled by the male protagonist's discovery that *his* father-figures are no longer available to him. Hence the far bleaker ending: in *Life Classes* the continuing commitment to certain selected elements of the past (together with a burning of the brushwood that obstructs the view over the water) offered Mary Cameron a measure of emotional security, an anchor; it was not incompatible with the generous acceptance of a continuing relationship with father and lover (if not exactly the relationship either might want). In *The Vacant Lot* the only remaining option is flight to another country and the final desolate image of the abandoned car amid the snow. That final image refers us back to the film's title: the 'vacant lot' is not only the name of a female rock group, it is also Nova Scotia and, by extension, Canada. In *Life Classes* it was sufficient for Mary Cameron to move to Halifax, retaining her Cape Breton 'anchor'; here, the couple fly off to Los Angeles. MacGillivray's rejection of 'Canadian pastoral' appears to be complete and irreversible, and one wonders where he will go from there. He can hardly go on making movies about the necessity for leaving behind a bankrupt cultural tradition.

Reflecting on its last 15 minutes and the sensitivity with which they are realized — a sensitivity largely absent from



The Vacant Lot

everything that goes before — I can grope my way to a perception that the raw material of the film *might* have been transmuted into a fitting companion-piece to *Life Classes*, part-complement, part-antithesis. The transmutation that actually takes place is quite other: the narrative becomes dominated by the male mid-life crisis and its compensatory and reassuring fantasy. I have an uneasy feeling that the man-in-mid-life-crisis is currently replacing the confused-young-man-who-doesn't-know-where-he's-going as the Canadian cinema's archetypal protagonist: the syndrome proliferates through *Decline of the American Empire*, and is the explicit subject of Jacques Leduc's *Trois Pommes à côté du Sommeil* (also screened in the Toronto festival). This is not, of course, to assert that mid-life crises (any more than young men's confusions) are not a legitimate subject for a film — provided the topic can be treated with a certain critical distance and social perspective, and not merely used (as has usually been the case, in Canadian as in American cinema) as a pretext for male self-indulgence at the expense of women. Such is the case with *The Vacant Lot*.

There is a key scene in the film. Patti's rock group needs a lead guitarist; though on principle all-women, and feminist, they take on David/Fullerton. There is a certain sense of mutual advantage: they are inexperienced, inexpert, technically primitive, but attuned to the contemporary scene; he is a has-been who looks back nostalgically to his days with a group who have left him behind, transforming themselves and changing their name, but he is tech-

nically proficient, a professional. The group is hired to play a gig in a club. During the performance, David increasingly seizes the limelight, taking over the show, upstaging Patti. His behaviour looks, in fact, embarrassing in the extreme (such is the film's failure of realization): a middle-aged man making a fool of himself, aping the mannerisms of a teenager. But apparently we are not expected to see it like this: he earns the applause of the audience at the expense of Patti, whose reaction moves from discomfiture to rage — a reaction that appears totally justified, but which we are apparently expected to find unreasonable. The sequence culminates backstage, with a discussion of Patti behind her back in which one of her female fellow-performers (all of whom have been completely reliant on her) describes her as a 'bitch.'

Of course, as presented in the film, that is what she is. She is also (and this seems very much the point) a lesbian: in fact the terms 'bitch' and 'lesbian' come to seem virtually interchangeable. She is *also*, again, (an issue the film consistently refuses to confront) the founder, organizer and leader of the group, without whom it would never even have come into being: it is clear that neither the angelic and non-aggressive Trudi (whose greatest virtue is that she poses no threat to men) nor the other women in the group would ever have been capable of Patti's initiative. Moving as it does towards the conscription of another woman to clinch the put-down of the active and energetic woman who is fighting for, and to some degree achieving, autonomy and freedom from male control, this seems to me among

the most offensive scenes I have witnessed in the cinema since *An Officer and a Gentleman*. It is somewhat difficult to figure out how the author of *Life Classes* would justify it, though there may be a clue in the earlier film's apparent antipathy to abortion as a solution to unwanted and unintended pregnancy, and the way this connects with the new film's animus towards lesbians: one could extract some such confused statement as, Yes, it's wonderful for women to move towards autonomy and self-determination, deciding their own destinies, so long as they are heterosexual and want to bear children.

And, *The Vacant Lot* seems to add, so long as they conceive their destiny as that of consoling middle-aged male failures (though that is an implication totally at odds with anything in *Life Classes*). In retrospect, the whole film seems to move towards the moment where Trudi at last bares her breasts and offers herself to David in an archetypal Oedipal bargain: as he has replaced her father, she will in turn become his mother (she tells him that she will take care of him, in what the film seems to wish to offer as a feminist statement). The essential project is lightly disguised under cover of an 'equalizing' relationship (he learns from her, she learns from him...). What gives the whole thing away is Trudi's vacuity: she is, unlike the supremely inconvenient Patti, quite simply a male fantasy figure, without complexity and with no real autonomy as a character, there in the film to comfort and reassure the poor beached whale (more of a tadpole, actually) as mother, angel and daughter. Complexity, indeed, is what the film conspicuously lacks: the complexity I found (and still find) in *Life Classes*, of which I wrote that nothing in the film is simple. In *The Vacant Lot*, everything is.

I want to make it clear that I do not see this reading of *The Vacant Lot* as invalidating my reading of *Life Classes*: my admiration for the earlier film is not seriously affected. It was a sacred tenet of auteur theory in its early days that one had to see a filmmaker's work in its entirety, and read each film strictly in relation to a defined authorial personality. For a long time now I have been more interested in films than in authors. This is not by any means to detach the author from the film or negate his presence. It is rather to assert, once again, that a great film is the product not of a single mind or personality but a confluence of factors (of which that mind or personality may well be the most impor-

tant, but still not operating in a vacuum). The days when one felt compelled to love every film by Alfred Hitchcock or Howard Hawks are surely long passed. I am slightly troubled now that I distinguished MacGillivray as a 'great artist,' which credits him with an intellectual and ideological control over his material that I no longer see him as possessing; I still regard *Life Classes* as a great film, and it is obviously his, obviously a personal work — it could not have been made by anyone else. It seems, however, that I stand alone in this estimate: among *CineACTION!* contributors, Andrew Britton detests the film and Richard Lippe regards it as 'an academic exercise.'

Mise-en-scène Is Alive and Well and Living in Taiwan

Hou Hsiao-Hsien has now been 'discovered' in the West so many times (most influentially, perhaps, in the pages of the *Village Voice*) that it is somewhat surprising that his films have had so little distribution outside the festival circuit. Prints of *Daughter of the Nile* and *Summer at Grandpa's* appear to be available, as both have been shown in single screenings at repertory theatres in Toronto; but none of his films seems, so far, to have been honoured with a 'run' in North America. Now that *City of Sadness* has won the top award at Venice perhaps this situation will be rectified: though not without their difficulties for western audiences, the films are accessible, thematically engaging, stylistically extraordinary, intensely moving, and obviously the product of a fine sensibility and distinguished intelligence.

The reasons for the reluctance of distributors, theatre managers and audiences to take the plunge may be quite simple: as simple as, for example, the difficulty of remembering, spelling and pronouncing the director's name. For the record, David Overbey, the Toronto festival's resident expert on Asian cinema, renders it as, roughly, 'Ho Shiow-Shien'; and 'Ho' is the surname, which surely simplifies considerably the problem of identification. Beyond this is a more general resistance to Asian cinema, simply because there is suddenly so much of it and reliable maps are not available. The Toronto festival's massive retrospective a few years back was obviously of great value as pioneer work, but its service to a filmmaker of Hou's distinction is not entirely positive: faced with a bewildering prolifera-

tion of unfamiliar names and titles, with every film dutifully lauded in the catalogue, what does the poor festival-goer do? See everything, which would entail missing virtually every non-Asian film in the festival? Try a random sampling, knowing how hit-and-miss the results will be? Or avoid the retrospective altogether and concentrate on territory in which there are at least familiar landmarks and names that one has heard of? Coward that I am, I opted for the third alternative, and so didn't discover Hou until after everyone else. I went to *Daughter of the Nile* last year because David Overbey declared in the festival catalogue that Hou is the greatest living filmmaker. I have not always shared Mr. Overbey's enthusiasms in the past, and I went in a spirit of extreme scepticism. Within five minutes I sensed that I was in the presence of the work of a major artist. The remainder of the film fully confirmed this impression, and it has since been reconfirmed by the earlier *Summer at Grandpa's* and the most recent *City of Sadness*.

Yet I feel little confidence in writing about Hou's films; I regard everything I write as tentative and provisional, but this more so than usual. My knowledge of Taiwanese history and Taiwanese culture could charitably be described as minimal; I also know next to nothing about the immediate context within which Hou works, Taiwanese cinema. Two other Taiwanese films were screened in this year's festival, and I went to both. I walked out of Peter Wang's *First Date* after half-an-hour: it was not necessarily a dreadful movie, but I was not in the mood for John-Hughes-with-subtitles (and without Molly Ringwald — definitely without Molly Ringwald: the film appeared exclusively male-centred). Anyway Wang (before the screening) informed us that he is 'as yankee as anyone,' and this is the only film he has made in Taiwan: it can hardly be taken to represent that country's cinema. Yu Wei-Yen's *Gang of Three Forever* is another matter. I am not convinced by David Overbey's assertion (in the festival catalogue) that '... the major thrust of the film is not political, but emotional...' (Anyway, what exactly does such an opposition mean? Is politics somehow insulated from emotion? Hasn't the Women's movement made us aware that 'the personal is political?'). The film takes up the political history of Taiwan from roughly the point where *City of Sadness* breaks off, and dramatizes its progress through the development of the characters, their attitudes, their shifting rela-

tionships. In the last resort almost as bleak as *City of Sadness* (like which, though chronicling a much longer period, it moves from premature jubilation into progressive disillusionment), it is Yu's first feature film, and an extremely impressive and assured debut.

Hou, however, is something else again: one of the only living filmmakers in the world who has evolved a personal style (not a set of tics or mannerisms) that embodies an authentic personal vision. But I must be careful with that term: in the present critical climate,

'personal visions' amount to). He belongs, in short, in the company of the two directors his work most consistently evokes.

I have always regarded Ozu and Mizoguchi as polar opposites within classical Japanese cinema: stasis vs. movement, the closed square vs. intersecting diagonals, clarity vs. chiaroscuro, the cut vs. the dissolve, absence of touch vs. often violent physical contact. To an extent, Hou's style might be seen as the reconciliation of Mizoguchi and Ozu. The suggestion leads one to reflect

sympathy for them. In many shots in *City of Sadness* the camera remains completely static, as in Ozu. Yet instead of the Ozu mid-shot, we have the Mizoguchi long shot, and in place of Ozu's tendency to the still portrait (one or two characters firmly centred in a frame whose edges are rarely broken) we have constant movement within, out of and beyond the frame: the sense of offscreen space, of a 'reality' existing outside the confines of the image, is as strong in Hou as in Mizoguchi (or Renoir). This generates a constant tension between stasis and movement, the contemplative and the dynamic, that is unique, extremely powerful, and marvelously realized.

Hou has insisted that his films do not make political statements, that he has a dread of producing 'propaganda.' This is accurate, and not in the least disingenuous: it does not contradict the fact that the films embody a clear (if often complex) political position, both in the arena of sexual (or gender) politics and of national (and international) politics. The aging patriarch of *Summer at Grandpa's* is consistently wrong in his perceptions and conclusions; the central consciousness becomes that of a small girl who understands what he can't understand. The central thesis of *City of Sadness* is that the Japanese occupation of Taiwan was terrible, but the Chinese Nationalist takeover that followed it at the end of World War II was much, much worse; the film's two most sympathetic male characters study Marx together. The film opens in jubilation — a new child born as the radio announces the defeat of Japan and the end of the occupation — and traces a progressive dwindling into defeat and despair, all this traced through the fortunes of a family. By the end, no one is left except the aged, obsolete patriarch and a lunatic. The concern with the family seems as consistent in Hou as in Ozu; Hou is much more explicit about the direct effects of social-political change on the family's disintegration.

Always, the style — the 'way of looking' — prevents our being sucked in to share the despair implicit in the narrative. Rather, we are situated at a distance, at once contemplative and sympathetic, from which we can share the characters' emotions and experiences whilst retaining our own perceptions, our capacity for thought and action. Above all, Hou represents *intelligence*, not a quality I would care to attribute to most of our celebrated contemporary purveyors of 'personal visions.'



City of Sadness

almost anyone can be credited with a 'personal vision,' from Cronenberg and Lynch to John Hughes, and it then takes only a subtle terminological shift for the first two of these to become 'visionaries.' Hou is not in the least a 'visionary,' in the sense in which I understand the term. What I have in mind here might be better called a 'way of seeing,' or of 'regarding': it applies more to style than to content (in so far as the two can be distinguished). Hou's movies are certainly not reducible to aesthetic exercises (which is what a preoccupation with defining a visual style is often reduced to): as much as Ozu or Mizoguchi, he is concerned to explore and illuminate his chosen subject-matter. But he can equally never be reduced to a set of themes (the expression of disgust with human sexuality, or the misguided belief in the efficacy or interest of yuppie teenage rebellion: the sort of thing most of these

that 'style' (when it is more than a set of mannerisms) is above all the testimony to a spiritual dimension and not tied to specific techniques: of the Hou films I have seen, *Summer at Grandpa's* is the most Ozu-esque, yet the camera moves far more frequently than in *City of Sadness* (which more strongly evokes Mizoguchi). Hou claims that when he made *Summer at Grandpa's* he had never seen an Ozu film. I believe him: his films do not strike me as in the least 'derivative' — given the usually pejorative connotations of the term — and one is talking more of affinities than influences, least of all imitations.

Hou's films draw attention, however inadvertently, to what Ozu and Mizoguchi have in common: an insistence upon a contemplative distance (achieved by absolutely different, largely opposite technical means), a detachment from the characters that is by no means incompatible with an intense

Working Class Fates

by Scott Forsyth

Two raucously funny and politically fierce comedies were the highlight of the festival for me. Each centres upon the hard times and uncertain future of the working class: Michael Moore's *Roger and Me* is set in the decaying industrial heartland of capitalist America; Zelimir Zilnik's *The Way Steel was Tempered* reports from an equally decaying steel mill in ostensibly socialist Yugoslavia. While the political news in the films is hardly encouraging, each shows an accomplished ease at combining a radical and popular cultural intervention with the vitality of working class subjects — and that leaves a much more optimistic resonance.

Roger and Me would be rare enough if it only focused upon working people and made its key political point the need for hard class struggle against the onslaught of Reaganism. But it also seems likely to become a theatrical success — an extraordinary rarity for an openly committed documentary. Festival audiences in Toronto loved the film and voted it Most Popular and a major studio has purchased distribution rights. The reluctant ruling class hero, Roger Smith, Chairman of General Motors, is so discomfited that his PR flacks, also prominent in the film, have counterattacked in the *New York Times*. Moore and the film have received friendly media attention, often of a nervously condescending kind: given the timid conformity of media in the West, leftism offers a curiosity value. Nonetheless, widening audiences and the buzz of publicity for radical messages are welcome indeed.

The film's story is America in the Reagan '80s — specifically the sad fate of Flint, Michigan when General Motors lays off thirty thousand auto workers and shifts factories to Mexico. It is an angry expose of the grim costs of the corporate brigandage, mystical market "logic" and relentless international restructuring championed in these times. The familiar consequences — the fall in working class living standards, impoverishment for many and

engorgement for the rich few — are mercilessly portrayed and dissected.

But it is also memorably a personal documentary — we start with Moore's baby pictures — and his voice engages the spectator through the film, shifting amusingly from guileless investigator to pointed political jibes to stunned incredulity at ruling class rhetoric. The enjoyment here involves a parody of the authoritative voice-over of a traditional documentary, but the complexity of the voice — emotional and analytical — is based on its articulation with family, class and history. The family represented is specifically of the working people of Flint's auto plants and immediately connected to class militance: "Uncle Roy was in the Great Sitdown Strike of 1937." The trajectory from the peak of labour rebellion in the '30s to the apparent "social contract" and prosperity of the '50s to crisis and retreat in the '70s and '80s counterpoints and constantly deepens our response to the contemporary events portrayed.

Those events are indeed traumatic. The class struggle in Flint is waged, not only in the plants, but in a mental hospital, outside a blood-selling clinic, in a heart-rending series of evictions, at the Taco Bell where auto workers are not taking to "retraining." Surprisingly, this is often funny as well as moving. Moore may get into trouble with liberals who like their class misery pathetic; there are no easily categorized and forgotten images of the poor or homeless. These people are variously angry, resigned, bitter, cheerily dogged or downright quirky. (The bunny lady will certainly stick in your mind; connoisseurs of cinematic rabbit mortality will have their most memorable moment since Godard's *Weekend*.) The human costs of Reaganomics are clear but the people retain dignity and strength. This is also far from leftist clichés of workers in heroic posture against the class enemy. 1937 is constantly recalled to show both the need for and the relative absence of class politics in Flint.

What lifts the film towards true hilarity is the way this story of devastation is rigorously juxtaposed — even though it feels made up as we go along — with what the ruling class says and does in the crisis. Moore's personalizing has its brilliantly strategic parallel (and its title) when we begin the film's mock subject — a running trope that the film we are watching is about the attempt to make a film which brings GM's Roger Smith to Flint to witness the damage he has wrought. Of course he never comes and

we see only futile efforts to track him down at country clubs, stockholders' meetings or Christmas parties. This gag unfolds with a folksy self-awareness of the process of filmmaking which draws the audience into the film — but with none of the frigidity of academic theories of self-reflexive cinema. When we finally come face to face with smiling Roger's terse dismissal, Moore has accomplished exactly what he says he wanted to do: "Put a face on the enemy."

What we begin to examine and laugh at is a dialectic of the grinning face of Reaganism and its effects. City officials embark on a desperate circus of ideological flim-flam and dubious schemes to substitute for a real local economy. A TV evangelist is brought in to "heal" the ailing city. Anita Bryant comes to say "Cheer up, America!" Pat Boone is selling God and Amway. Bob (*The Newlywed Game*) Eubanks is unforgettably despicable. Miss America parades, waving sweetly, past boarded up homes and stores. Ron himself comes to take a few unemployed for pizza and suggests moving to Texas. Owen Bieber, president of the UAW, comes to help but looks completely befuddled by Moore's suggestion of another sitdown strike. The local elite happily carry on as usual while the city crumbles. These interviews certainly inspire ridicule but Moore takes care to allow us some sympathy for these happy clowns — they are skewered by their own words and their total inadequacy to the harsh world they are supposed to explain and pacify. Our laughter becomes political.

Even while we might be thinking these outlandish scenes are somehow staged, the story continues to escalate. Flint builds a luxurious convention hotel but no tourists come — and the locals can't afford it. \$100 million goes into AutoWorld, an inane Disney-like tribute to the auto industry decaying all around it, complete with workers singing to the robots who are replacing them — it only lasts six months. Most obscenely logical, Flint builds a huge new jail, since, in the new "crime capital" of the States, there are some jobs for ex-auto workers... guarding former workmates less fortunate. Reaganism and its "affirmative" spectacles in whatever medium seem nothing so much as a foolish Potemkin Village — it's all circus and no bread.

All these levels of narrative in interviews, near-interviews, vérité observation, archival footage and media

extracts are richly and meticulously edited. Moore's sardonic tones take us through a relentless clash of rich and poor, rhetorical bombast and damaged lives, ideologues and victims, historical possibilities and current constrictions. The effect is superbly heavy-handed — just the mix of outrage and irony this social order demands.

Moore's accomplishment — with his militant voice and pugnacious class-charged montage — may be in offering an investigation and representation, not of class as an essence or a particular set of images, but of class *relations*. That is, social relations which must be constantly remade and fought over, which are historically variable with political will and organization, on both class sides, for better or worse. That is why, within apparent defeat and confusion, Moore lays bare the evident difficulty of rebuilding working class lives and working class politics but does not invite or indulge in despair. Reality is changeable.

A good political film opens up a host of issues to debate, so I'll briefly offer a few of my contentious impressions. For instance, much of the accessibility of the film rests on the populist lineage of American radicalism. It is a resilient and necessary component to any imaginable opposition in the States. But it nevertheless has always produced a contradictory politics, with right-wing potential at times. The film records several xenophobic reactions to the layoffs directed at Japanese competitors and it would be important to pursue this, given the prominence of nationalism and protectionism in union policy, whose obdurate complacency is elsewhere derided. In fact, the arrogance and parochialism of American nationalism are prominent in the film's mockery of the Reaganite circus, but the volatile hierarchy and resentments of the unfolding international division of labour need more careful scrutiny. Moore's focus on one community is a great strength, but it is well to realize that local struggles may not simply add up to workers of the world uniting.

The historical sense of a class narrative from the militant '30s to the prosperous '50s to the long contemporary crisis is crucial to the film's analysis and politics. Those decades are invoked with a nostalgic glow, which given the present dark picture is perfectly comprehensible. Moore does not imply that the past can be simply recreated but I think the uncomfortable contradictions of the half century are worth dwelling on. The spread of "affluence" to the organized working class in the '50s and '60s was

purchased at considerable cost. The expulsion of the militant leadership of the '30s in the police state repression of HUAC, the integration of the union bureaucracy into an arm of management's regulatory regime and the drastic narrowing of class politics prepared the way for the American union movement's suicidal acquiescence with the ruling class offensive of the '80s. We see the results but need more explanation. It also needs to be clear that the post-war boom was contiguous with imperial rampaging from Korea to Guatemala to Vietnam. Current imperial strategies — whether terrorism in Nicaragua or "free trade zones" in Mexico — need to be understood in that historical trajectory as well. In retrospect, the boom was always fragile, ready to be wrested back when profit ratios or America's imperial position declined.

Given Moore's clarion call for opposition building, there is a striking absence in the film of the radical movements which have persisted through the '80s: feminism, black civil rights, gay liberation, environmentalism and solidarity with the third world. This is understandably a result of focus. Partly, these movements, with largely middle class constituencies and leaders, have not made a lasting impact in the working class. It also appears that in crisis the priority of class asserts itself. But some sense of the broad character of potential struggles would give a more optimistic picture — and would correspond to both the complex intersection of oppressions and the multiple levels of the ruling class attack.

Solidarity of workers across national borders will be especially important in resistance to disasters like Flint, all over a "globalizing" capitalism. In fact, Moore has personal experience of the importance of solidarity struggles since he was scandalously fired as editor of *Mother Jones* for refusing to publish an anti-Sandinista article, when that magazine was moving towards a more mainstream profile. These shortfalls are obviously not from lack of political acumen, so a film this rich could be expected to take them up.

Some of the success of this film will be based on the playful distance from a traditional didactic model of leftist documentary. However, Moore is securely within the best of the tradition. His collaborators have made films like *The Atomic Cafe* and *With Babies and Banners* (about the famous Flint strike as well). The engaging "voice" and complex editing construction are part of the refinement of an increasingly elaborate style of analysis, which is simultaneously observational and partisan, in documentaries since the '60s. *Roger and Me* seems strongly influenced by the work of Emile de Antonio; perhaps it is not too much to compare this film to the humour, anger and rigorously provocative montage of that master of the American political documentary. There is also something of the agitational newsreels and campaign films of the socialists of the '30s in *Roger and Me*. Like those films, it stirs the emotions and enlists the solidarity of those already committed; that is what documentaries of the left should do — it is an



Roger and Me

honourable and too often derided task. It also, re-inventing and revitalizing the conventions, stands to reach and entertain a much broader audience of those appalled and victimized by ruling class strategies.

Moore's film offers us outrage and resilience and the repetitive call upon the explosive activism which has characterized American labour radicalism for at least a century. Moore does not specifically ground this in socialist politics, though he has been clearer in interviews. (See Alex Patterson, "Putting A Face on the Enemy," *Village Voice*, September 28, 1989.) But it is admirable enough that he has temporarily pushed the class struggle — the final taboo in American politics and the core of socialist politics — into the mainstream of political/cultural discourse.

Grim as things might be for workers in the capitalist world, a call for doctrinaire socialist transformation is hardly a straightforward or obvious one; Moore's reticence is tactically comprehensible. Actually existing socialism has not offered a credible and attractive alternative to the power of advanced capitalism, which has always dominated and deformed it. Extreme and daunting crises rack most of these nations, even if we discount the gloating Western press and are about to gag on one more

announcement of "the death of socialism."

The Way Steel was Tempered shows us a fictional, almost allegorical world, but a more nuanced and complex reality. As much as Moore's *Flint*, it is a world of class conflict; indeed, we must remind ourselves that this story doesn't take place under capitalism, so little does this world link to socialist ideals. But the title, a play on Ostrovsky's epic of the Russian Civil War which became a staple of Stalinist education and cinema, takes us from the beginning to the contemporary end of "building socialism in one country." In this rattletrap socialism, resentful steel workers are pitted day to day against a collection of the most venal and corrupt manager/bureaucrats imaginable; they act like the Mafia and they aspire to be average Western capitalists. They're also incompetently running the factory into the ground, much more interested in black market schemes or foreign buyouts. The portrayal mocks the bureaucrats for their total betrayal of socialism and shows us the inequality and corruption "market" reforms and economic integration with the West will bring to the East (Yugoslavia is ahead of many of its "socialist" neighbours it seems).

The film has the rapid pace, political

wit and vulgar carrying on viewers may associate with another radical Yugoslav, Makavejev — sort of Socialist Surrealism. Economic decay and political disillusionment generate a personal crisis for Leo, the potentially heroic steel worker. Depressed, he plunges into a drunken reverie of brawling, fucking and rebellion which wrecks his marriage. The chaotic plot jokes about everything — chicken plucking, farting, coitus interruptus, Yugoslav yuppies, the Foreign Legion, Eastern rock, Japanese technology (and dwarfs), the extreme difficulty of killing wild boars. The humour has the anarchic logic of slapstick in American silent cinema and culminates with a crazed "uprising," the pulling down of a huge Stalinist statue — echoing 1956, but redolent of revolution East or West — and our poor working class hero in jail.

Zilnik clearly loves Leo and his idiosyncratic and rambunctious comrades; all the characters are presented and performed with great verve and charm. Socially, the humour gives us respect and affection for the rebellious workers but also a sense of the futile deadlock in social relations of moribund Stalinism (or Titoism). Zilnik also wants to show a recasting of sexual relations. Leo's rough masculinity is softened by the evident greater sense and sensitivity of



The Way Steel was Tempered

all the women: this transformation is more informed by the tradition of gender egalitarianism and "free love" in socialism than by Western feminism. It is a tender but limited critique; the escapades and adventures regenerate the couple and a baby offers a sense of the future that the social world cannot.

In a wonderfully dream-like finale, everyone is saved by the arrival of two Western businessmen, dressed like benevolent wizards. As collectors of revolutionary art, they guarantee the decrepit mill's future and want only the loan of Leo as a living sculpture of the model Socialist Realist worker! The pretensions of one line of "socialist" aesthetics are hilariously revealed as all ideological facade — and just another commodity. Leo returns a year later, in triumph, in a Cadillac bearing gold presents, to see his new son. Its a superb satirical jab at the supposed beneficence and riches of "modernity" in a fairy tale West — and the widespread naivete about it in the East. (Given that the Western bourgeoisie are poised like vultures to "Latin Americanize" Eastern Europe as a rich source of exploitable cheap labour, the satire can be seen as very gentle and partial; *Roger and Me* should be required viewing for oppositionists in the East.)

So, the solutions proffered to the social conflicts dramatized are either fantastic or private, not exactly politically encouraging when we might have the whiff of revolution in our nostrils.

But a coda in which Leo takes his baby to the glowing steel furnace and promises him a place there, pulls us back to the collective — family and class together — and the energy and exuberance the film has found in its working people. The Stalinist imagery of forging is re-cast, with history uncertain but open. This is a suggestive twist out of allegory.

As enjoyable as this satire is, the allegorical form has its limits — I was left wanting this intelligent filmmaker to give me more complex arguments about his country's dilemmas. Given the ferocity of national antagonism in Yugoslavia, and the sometimes horrific outbursts of nationalism which have accompanied reforms within Stalinism elsewhere, the film's complete silence on these issues is striking. Why should anyone be sanguine about the history of reactionary nationalism in Poland, the Baltic countries or, in fact, Serbia or Croatia?

Similarly, no one in this film has anything to say about socialism at all; it seems rightly irrelevant to the managers who treat socialist property as their own, but, as well, the workers' resistance is based solely upon "vitality" and individualistic "psychology" — its class nature is essentially passive. There is no historical memory of revolutionary and collective ideals at all. Whether this is literally true or not in the Yugoslavia of "workers' self-management," however bureaucratic, the humour of this blan-

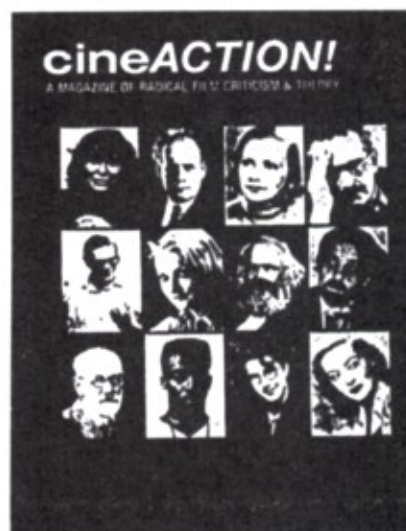
kness both denounces and depends upon the Party's discrediting and smothering of political life. Perhaps the widespread circulation of *The Way Steel Was Tempered* on Yugoslav screens indicates a more complicated and vibrant kind of debate is occurring or developing. It seems to me that a political vacuum can be dangerous; look again to Poland where a great working class rebellion has issued in a Solidarity leadership gleefully embracing IMF "market" starvation for its own supporters, not to mention the glint of anti-semitic, anti-Red hysteria in ayatollah Gilep's eye. The programme of working class rebellion, the potential re-invention of socialism or the draconian restoration of capitalism — these are life and death issues as Stalinism reforms or dismantles itself.

Working class fates look dark and difficult, East or West. Zilnik effectively skewers corrupt Stalinists who have deformed socialism for so long and offers in the collective vitality of its working class heroes a hint of a different future. *Roger and Me* specifically devotes itself to revitalizing a repressed political discourse; it movingly lays bare the consequences of today's capitalism and challenges us once again to the enormous work of fighting back. These may be working class fates, but there is no need of simple fatalism. That is felt in each film, over and above political articulation, against oppressive systems, by radical laughing.

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